

YOUNG KLONDIKE

STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER

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YOUNG KLONDIKE'S DEATH TRAP; OR LOST UNDERGROUND.

BY AUTHOR OF "YOUNG KLONDIKE"
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With a fearful cry the man fell back in the boat, and all in the same moment the old prospector dropped into Miss Edith's arms. "I'm a goner!" he groaned. "He's done me! Good-by, all! Young Klondike, you take my claim!"

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CHAPTER I.

THE MAN FROM MAD MOUNTAIN.

PAN out another batch, Ned. Don't be discouraged; because the first pan shows no color, it's no matter that they will all run the same."

All right, Dick! Anything you say goes. Only thing is I'd like to have it decided whether there is anything in the blessed hole or not before those fellows, whoever they may be, come down and spot us."

Thus saying, Ned Golden filled the pan for the fourth time with the sand dug out of the old creek bed, and Dick Luckey pouring in water brought in from the Klondike river nearby; the pan was violently agitated and the water allowed to run off by degrees, carrying with it the surplus sand and gravel, leaving only the finer sand behind.

Ned peered into the pan anxiously, but could see no trace of the precious yellow dust.

It was rather discouraging.

Ned Golden, better known as Young Klondike, had a reputation to sustain as a successful prospector. So did Dick Luckey, his chum and partner.

In fact, Golden & Luckey were known from Dawson City to Juneau as the one firm which rarely made a mistake in the move with the prospecting pan—in short, the men which never failed.

But it looked like failure now—very decidedly.

Golden & Luckey were off on an entirely new venture.

This time they called them away up the Klondike almost to the head of canoe navigation.

There they had stopped at a promising spot to try their hand, while their largest canoe, with two others of their party, had gone on up the river to see if other

prospectors were working in the vicinity further along, which Young Klondike suspected was the case.

"Shake 'em up! Shake 'em up!" said Dick, excitedly. "Let's see what we've got there."

But the more Ned shook the pan, the more the color wouldn't come.

At last he dumped out the remainder of the sand in disgust and gave it up.

"No use, Dick," he declared; "there's nothing in this hole."

Dick took it very philosophically.

"Well, never mind, Ned," he replied. "We can't always hope to hit it. Suppose we give it up?"

Ned looked at the hole dug out in the bed of the old dried up creek rather disgustingly.

"I don't mind giving it up," he said, "but it makes me mad to think that we should have wasted so much time here on this hole."

It was rather aggravating.

In order to begin to prospect on the Klondike it is always necessary to spend a good deal of time.

Gold don't lie there scattered about the surface of the ground any more than elsewhere. It is only to be had by good hard work.

It was the day before that Young Klondike's prospecting party pitched their tents on the bluff near the bed of the old creek.

The site was chosen because old creek beds are usually supposed to be good places for gold digging.

The average depth at which the discovery may be expected is about twenty feet.

Not a very deep hole for two strong young fellows to dig through soft, loamy soil and gravel, one would think.

Quite so, if the soil was only soft, but it isn't. Instead of that it is invariably frozen to the depth of several feet, and in order to penetrate the frost, all

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through the night a big fire of brush wood burned over the bed of the old creek.

Then during the day there was an alternation of burning and digging, until at last the frost bed was penetrated and the real work of digging for gold began.

This was rather late in the afternoon.

Miss Edith Welton and the Unknown had gone up the Klondike in a canoe as has been stated. The hope of Ned and Dick was that they might strike gold before they returned.

But this hope had to be abandoned now, although Ned still declared that he believed there was gold to be found in the bed of the creek.

"I won't give it up without another trial, Dick," he declared. "All the same there's no use in doing any more about it now. We shall have to give it up for to-day, of course."

This was quite necessary, for darkness was already upon them.

It was the month of October, and in the Klondike country the days get very short at this season of the year.

So the picks and pans were thrown aside, and a big fire built in front of the tent.

Ned went to cooking supper, while Dick wandered down to the edge of the bluffs, where a good view of the Klondike river could be obtained, and looked long and earnestly up that golden stream in the hope of seeing the canoe.

He soon caught sight of it far up the river, and fired a rifle shot as a signal.

Immediately there was an answering shot, and soon the canoe drew near.

The Unknown sat in the stern paddling, and Edith was waving her handkerchief in the bow.

"See anybody, Edith?" shouted Dick.

"Yes," was the reply. "There's a boat with a couple of men coming down the river. They are taking their time, though. Don't believe they will be along for a good half hour yet."

Dick postponed further questions until Edith and the Unknown came ashore.

"What do you make out of them?" he asked the little detective who had been their associate in all their wanderings and adventures in the gold country. "Who are they anyhow?"

"Don't believe they are anybody in particular," remarked the Unknown. "At least if they are I can't make it out."

"What do they look like?"

"Oh, one is an old man with a long gray beard, and the other a stupid-looking French Canadian; at least that's all I could make out of them, but then I only saw them through the glass."

"Well, I suppose we shall see them when they get here," said Dick. "They'll hardly pass us. It's time enough to bother our heads about them when they come."

"That's right. How is everything going?"

"Slow."

"Struck anything?"

"Not a thing."

Just then Young Klondike joined the party and there was more talk, after which all went to supper, and considering that they were in that vast wilderness thirty miles and more up the Klondike where even the boldest prospectors rarely penetrate, it was a very good supper, indeed.

After it was over there was another lookout for the strangers, but they did not appear.

Then Young Klondike's party settled down for a quiet evening. Ned played the banjo and Edith sang, and the Unknown told strange stories of adventure in many lands, and at last, about nine o'clock, all turned in for the night.

But not all to sleep—oh, no!

It was never Young Klondike's custom to leave his camp unguarded, and he did not try that dangerous experiment on this occasion.

He took first turn himself, and then it was Dick, and then the Unknown.

With three such old-time Yukoners on the lookout, it would seem that no boat ought to have come down the Klondike and entered the creek unperceived during the hours of darkness, and yet just this happened, although on whose watch we cannot say.

The boat came up the creek and there were two men in it just as Edith had stated.

But the men never came up on the bluff, and when morning dawned there was no sign of the boat, and Young Klondike and his friends were wholly unaware that it had ever been there.

Edith bustled about and got breakfast. Ned built the fire for her and Dick filled the kettle from the creek, while the Unknown, who went out early with his gun, was fortunate enough to shoot two rabbits which went first rate after being carefully broiled over the hot coals.

"Going to give it up and push on further, Young Klondike?" asked the Unknown, while they were demolishing the rabbits.

"Not this morning," replied Ned. "I'm determined to have another hack at this hole before giving it up."

"Do you think it will pay you after your yesterday's experience?"

"Don't know whether it will or not. I'm going to try, though."

"Then I say let's all turn to and help, so as to be done with it. Strange what became of those fellows in the boat."

This subject had been discussed before, but without arriving at any conclusion.

Ned thought they must have passed in the night. Dick was of the opinion that they had tied up somewhere on the way down the river.

As for the Unknown if he had any opinion he did not express it. The idea of coming to this lonely spot was to try prospecting in some place where prospectors had never been before. Finding others ahead of them the Unknown had lost his interest, and felt

decidedly like abandoning the spot and pushing further up the Klondike until they had penetrated far beyond the usual range.

But Young Klondike's will was law. The Unknown never interfered with it, and consequently work on the prospect hole immediately began.

Ned's idea was to dig a few feet further and then try panning again.

It was easy to do this for they had now passed the frost limit, and the bottom of the hole was simply a deposit of coarse, black sand.

Young Klondike and Dick Luckey went down in the hole and began work with their picks and shovels.

The Unknown remained on the ground above to receive the buckets of sand as they were passed up.

For about half an hour everything went on well enough, when all at once Dick gave a sharp cry.

"Great Scott, Ned! the bottom of this thing is sinking down! I can feel it go!"

Ned scarcely heeded the warning, for he felt it going, too.

The sand upon which they stood seemed to be moving downward in one solid mass.

The boys had just time to climb up out of the hole when the bottom of the shaft fell out with a rush, sending up a cloud of dust.

"Good thunder! what are you trying to do up there—kill a feller?" roared a voice from below.

It was very startling to hear that voice so.

The sand had not fallen more than six feet, and now, as Young Klondike and the others looked, they could see a tall, gray-bearded man standing beneath the bottomless hole.

He was bareheaded, and his clothes, which were the rough garments of a professional prospector, were covered with the sand.

"Hello, up there on top!" he shouted. "Hello!"

"Hello! Who are you?" roared the Unknown, who was the only one of the party who had sufficiently recovered from his astonishment as to be able to speak.

"Waal, now, I'm the man from Mad Mountain," came the reply out of the hole. "Say, stranger, that's who I am."

CHAPTER II.

DEATH PAYS A VISIT TO YOUNG KLONDIKE'S CAMP.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, if you ain't mad yourself you'd better come up out of that, neighbor," called the Unknown, staring down into the hole.

"Waal, now, I don't object," replied the stranger. "I can get up along the shore if I want to, but it would be a little easier if you threw me a rope."

The Unknown threw down the rope which he had been using on the buckets.

The man from Mad Mountain caught it and came up hand over hand as easily as an old sailor.

He was a pleasant-looking old fellow, with nothing bad about his face. As soon as he was on his feet, his first act was to shake hands all around.

"Waal, friends, I'm mighty glad to meet you here," he remarked. "You don't know what it is to have been three months alone with a rascally Habitant as I have been."

The Habitants are the French Canadians, who make a business of assisting the fur traders. Many of them are half-breeds, and they are the only men who really know the great northwest wilderness. They are a bold and much enduring race, but not noted for either honesty or intelligence. Young Klondike looked around for the Habitant, but could see no one else in the hole.

"Oh, he's asleep down there in the cave," replied the old man. "If the bottom was to drop out of the whole earth, I don't believe it would wake him up."

"What, is there a cave down there?" questioned Ned.

"Yes, there is, and I was sleeping in it when you fellows sent that big jag of sand plumping down."

"Certainly we never should have done it if we had known we were running any such risk."

"Oh, of course not. I well understand that. I was as much surprised to see you as you were to see me, and you were most confoundedly surprised about that, I daresay."

"Well, now, we just were," said Dick. "How did you get into that cave?"

"Why we pulled up the creek in the night and went in there and dragged our boat in after us. You see this is an old stamping ground of ours. We've been here before."

"Humph! Somebody caught napping," muttered the Unknown, but he did not interfere with Young Klondike's questioning, and Ned went on to ask the man's name.

"Oh, I'm old Joe Bunker," was the reply. "I'm well known down to Forty Mile, but not in Dawson. I was here before the rush. Might I ask who you uns be?"

Ned introduced himself.

"Ned Golden, eh?" said the old man. "You don't say! Everybody has heard of you. If you had said your name was Young Klondike I should have known you just as well."

Ned laughed.

"So my fame has gone before me," he said.

"Waal, everybody knows you," replied Bunker. "Is this other young feller Dick Luckey?"

"That's me," said Dick.

"Just so. You two were nothing but a couple of poor clerks in New York before you came to the Klondike, I am told."

"That's right."

"And now you are worth your millions?"

"We've done fairly well."

"Fairly well! Don't say that; own to the truth. You are the kings of the Klondike sure."

"Some like to call us that, but it's all nonsense, you know."

"Oh, I don't know about that. I think from what I have heard that you have thoroughly earned the title. I suppose this young lady is Miss Edith Welton?"

"You have heard about me, too, it seems," said Edith, pleasantly. "I didn't know I was so famous as all this."

"Everybody knows all about the firm of Golden & Luckey. You're a member of the firm, you know."

"Well, I certainly am."

"So I believe. I'm told that you first met Young Klondike on the way from Seattle to Juneau, that he saved you from a wrecked steamer—is that so?"

"Well, I believe it is," replied Edith. "I see you are pretty well posted about us all."

"Yes," said Bunker, in his slow way. "So I am. I could not help being, for everybody is talking about you, but, of course, you know that without being told."

"What do you know about me?" demanded the Unknown; "have I been talked over down at Forty Mile, too?"

"Well, I guess you have. I should say you had! You've come in for it, too."

"And what do they say about me?"

"Waal, neighbor, they call you the great Unknown."

The detective laughed heartily.

"That's what I am," he said. "That's my name."

"Is it? Well, they say down at Forty Mile that nobody knows your name, not even Young Klondike himself, though I can hardly believe that is true."

"It is, though," said Ned. "I don't know his name any more than you do, and upon my word I don't believe I ever shall."

This was the fact.

For some unexplained reason Young Klondike's friend preferred to keep his identity shrouded in mystery.

He had been a long time with the party now, but they knew him by no other name than the Unknown or Zed, the latter being short for Zedekiah, which he solemnly declared was his first name, although Young Klondike sometimes doubted that.

All they actually knew of him was that he claimed to be a detective and in the Klondike in search of a mysterious criminal whom he called "his man."

Who this man was or what crime he had committed was as much a mystery as the name of the Unknown, but one thing was certain, the detective was always on the lookout for him, and it was his custom to suddenly pounce upon some unoffending stranger, and declaring that he had found his man at last, threaten to put the handcuffs on him, only to apologize abjectly a moment later and let him go.

In fact this little trick was such a favorite one with

the Unknown that Ned was surprised that he had not played it on Mr. Joe Bunker.

But the Unknown did not try his usual trick now, and he seemed to get tired of all this talk.

"Come! Come!" he exclaimed. "We had better get to work here, Young Klondike, and do whatever we are going to do. As for the mine or rather the prospect hole, for you certainly can't call it a mine, the bottom seems to have dropped out of it altogether, and there is no use in wasting any more time fooling about here."

"You never will make anything here," said Joe Bunker. "That's sure, Young Klondike, but I can tell you where you can strike it rich."

"Where?" asked Ned, always ready for such information.

"Up on Mad Mountain, boss."

"Hello!" cried Dick. "You called yourself the man from Mad Mountain when we first caught sight of you down there in that hole."

"That's what I did. I called myself that because I just came from Mad Mountain. I've been working up there a month, and now I'm on my way down to Dawson City to locate my claim."

"If you intend to do that, you certainly don't want to give the secret away to us," said Ned.

"Oh, I don't care nothing about that. I'd rather have you uns working up there than to work alone any day. There's room enough for all. Besides, I'm an old man, with nobody in this world belonging to me. I can't hope to do much alone, anyhow. Take them papers, Young Klondike, and look 'em over. That will tell you all about my great discovery on Mad Mountain. After you've read 'em through, I'll show you some of the gold. I've got three sacks of it down in the boat."

Here was interesting information. Young Klondike scented a rich discovery. He knew these old-time prospectors well, and was quite aware that they never located in any one place permanently, no matter how rich it might prove to be, but were always on the move.

"Come right into the tent and we'll look over the papers now," he said, as he received them, and probably this is what he would have done if the Unknown had not suddenly given a sharp exclamation which attracted the attention of all.

"Hello! By the Jumping Jeremiah, there's your boat!"

The Unknown had walked over to the edge of the bluff and was looking down upon the little creek which worked its way into the Klondike at the foot of the rise.

"What! Is that scoundrel trying to rob me again? Was he awake after all?" roared Joe Bunker, making the edge of the bluff with one bound.

All followed him and all saw a small boat being rapidly pulled toward the Klondike by the Habitant.

"Stop there! Stop, you son of a thief!" Joe Bunker roared, unceremoniously seizing Dick's rifle which he happened to have in his hand.

"Don't kill him!" cried Edith, but the warning came too late.

Death—yes, double death—was booked for Young Klondike's camp then.

On the instant Joe Bunker fired, but quick as he was, the rascally Habitant fired first.

Then with a fearful cry the man fell back in the boat, and all in the same moment the old prospector dropped into Edith's arms.

"I'm a goner!" he groaned. "He's done me! Good-by all! Young Klondike, you take my claim!"

They were his last words.

He was dead.

So was the Habitant—dead in the boat.

And this was how a double death came to Young Klondike's camp.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF MAD MOUNTAIN.

It was a fearful shock to everyone.

Of course, it was hard to believe at first that old Joe Bunker was actually dead.

Ned was at his side in a moment, and with Edith to help him tried every means in his power to revive the man, but all in vain.

Meanwhile the Unknown and Dick ran down the bluff, the latter plunging into the creek without stopping to remove his clothes and intercepting the boat.

It was an easy matter to bring it ashore.

The Habitant was quite dead, shot through the heart.

He had done the business for poor old Joe Bunker, too.

When they came to examine the prospector's body, they found that he had been shot through the left lung.

Of course this double tragedy cast a deep gloom over Young Klondike's camp.

It took them some time to realize what had actually come upon them.

"We've got to accept the situation as it comes," said the Unknown. "We didn't kill these men, and although one of them died by a bullet from Dick's rifle, we really had nothing at all to do with it; but what we've got to do now is to bury them, and that's something that ought to be done right away."

All agreed to this and the bodies were prepared for the grave.

It was a solemn ceremony.

As it would have taken a long time to dig the two graves it was determined to bury them in the cave, the entrance to which was easily discovered when they came to look for it, opening in under the rocks which formed the base of the bluff.

Back where the shaft had been started there was a break in the rocks through which the sand had fallen.

No better place of burial could possibly be asked for than this cave here in the wilderness.

The bodies were laid side by side on the rocky floor.

Each was the murderer of the other, and there was nothing to choose between them, but it did seem strange that they should come to their death so.

A great flat stone was dropped into the bottom of the shaft which choked it up completely, and on top of this the earth which had been removed from the shaft was piled.

The entrance to the cave was then closed by rolling a big boulder in front of it and the job was done.

It was not until then that Young Klondike started in to examine the papers which poor old Joe Bunker had placed in his hands, little dreaming that he would never live to receive them back again.

They consisted of a journal kept day by day, and a rude map showing the location of Mad Mountain and the place on its side where the mine had been struck.

One entry impressed Young Klondike particularly.

It read as follows:

"This is certainly the richest lead I ever saw. I have been working here four weeks now, and the pay dirt grows richer and richer. If I had the provisions and other things necessary to sustain life, I should certainly try to stay here all winter, but as it is it is no use; the season is advancing, and the grub is about run out. Besides that I am in daily terror for fear Francois will murder me. I know he has it in mind. Twice I have detected him trying to hide the gold, with the idea of making off with it in the night and leaving me to my fate. I shall probably decide to pull out to-morrow, for to remain here any longer is certainly not safe."

"Poor wretch! The fate he feared has overtaken him," remarked Ned to Dick. "Well, he is avenged, and as we are not responsible for it all we can do is to pull up stakes and make for Mad Mountain—that is after we've buried the gold."

Now we have not yet mentioned the gold which was found in the boat.

It was stowed away in three good sized bags, and its weight so loaded down the boat that the slow progress the prospectors were making when Edith and the Unknown first caught sight of them was fully accounted for.

Not caring to be burdened with such a load, Ned determined to bury it on the bluff.

Probably it would have to remain there all winter, but if all went well it could be dug up in the spring.

The gold consisted of the usual coarse nuggets found so generally on the Klondike, and a good deal of dust with flake gold scattered through the bags.

Altogether it had the appearance of having come from a very rich claim, and Young Klondike anticipated great things from the Mad Mountain mine.

Night came upon them before all their preparations were completed, but it was determined to start right along.

"We might as well put in the night on the boats as

here in the tent," declared the detective. "Fact is, we haven't much time to lose if we expect to locate this claim and get back to Dawson before winter sets in. There is liable to be a snowstorm any time, and once the snow comes, it comes to stay."

It was Joe Bunker's boat which Ned and his companions determined to use.

Their own canoe they turned over to Edith, making it comfortable with warm rugs and a heavy bearskin.

This was taken in tow behind the boat, and the second canoe, being loaded with their belongings, was hitched on behind that.

Edith, who was pretty well tired out, retired at once, and was carefully covered up to protect her from the cold night air.

The others then entered the boat and pulled out upon the Klondike, and began to work their way up against the stream—no easy task, for the current was rather strong here.

All night long they kept steadily on, taking turns at sleeping.

Progress was slow but steady.

When morning dawned they were far up the Klondike, further than many prospectors had penetrated, but not yet to Mad Mountain by any means.

As soon as Edith was awake they put in shore and made a halt for breakfast.

Ned consulted poor Joe Bunker's map, and came to the conclusion that they would have to go fully twenty miles further before reaching Mad Mountain.

This map was a curious affair.

It was in six parts or sheets. One showed the location of Mad Mountain.

The different mountains were indicated by crosses, some on one side of the two wavy lines which stood for the river and some on the other.

Any prominent landmark was described and noted by numbers on the map. As for instance, No. 9, a big white rock; No. 11, a birch tree here; No. 18, here the river takes a bend and there are three spruce trees on the point, and so on.

Such were the notes and they were a great help as was the table of distances which seemed to be very carefully calculated.

The second map was of the ground between the river and the base of Mad Mountain, showing the road Joe Bunker had taken.

The third showed the side of the mountain, a trail being traced up by means of numbers in the same way. The fourth was a plan of the gulch where the diggings were located. The fifth showed the drifting which Joe Bunker had done out of the two prospecting shafts sunk on the claim.

The sixth map looked like a lot of unmeaning lines scrawled over the paper; they twisted and turned, all beginning at a large circle in the middle of the sheet, and radiating in every direction.

What these meant Ned could not tell, for there

were no notes on this sheet, and nothing to indicate what was intended.

Dick was of the opinion that the sixth map was no map at all, and meant nothing; but Ned could not believe this, for it had been rolled up with the rest of the papers and old Joe Bunker did not look like a man who would spend his time drawing lines on paper just for fun.

Late in the afternoon Young Klondike's party, working leisurely up the river, at last came in sight of a rocky peak some two thousand feet in height, rising alone above the foothills, and making a prominent figure in the surrounding landscape.

"Mad Mountain at last!" cried the Unknown. "There it is, boys, as sure as you live! Ye gods and little fishes! The map is right from first to last! It couldn't have been plainer if I'd made it myself!"

Ned thought the chances were decidedly against its being half as plain as they pulled ashore, landing in a little cove.

It was a wild, lonely spot, almost at the head of canoe navigation on the Klondike, which was now a mere creek winding in and out among the mountains, and bearing but little resemblance to that golden stream as seen further down.

"Our launch wouldn't have been in it," remarked Dick. "We never could have got here if we'd tried it in that."

The allusion was to the substantial naphtha launch in which Young Klondike and his party had done so much prospecting up and down the creeks.

It was a comfortable affair and very fast, but as Dick said, it never would have done here, for two miles back there had scarcely been water enough to float the boat.

"Shall we unload and push on up to the diggings now or wait till morning?" Edith asked when they found themselves on shore.

Ned was for trying it, but Dick wanted to go into camp where they were.

The Unknown sided with Dick and it was so decided. The tents were put up and supper cooked and everything made comfortable for the night.

"Next morning Ned and the Unknown started out early to hunt up the diggings which old Joe Bunker had left behind him.

It was no difficult task, for the maps proved as accurate as ever.

After a walk of about two miles they reached the base of the mountain and soon struck the trail, for the old prospector had piled up stones here and there to show just how he went.

Now followed a hard climb of some eight hundred feet, which brought them to a deep canyon, separating Mad Mountain from a lower elevation behind it, not visible from the river bank.

This canyon seemed to extend for a long distance back into the interior. Its sides were almost perpendicular, and were formed of black ragged rocks which almost closed in against each other above, giving the canyon a gloomy appearance.

The Unknown paused as they looked into it, exclaiming:

"By the Jumping Jeremiah! that's a sweet-looking spot! It's enough to give a feller the horrors to think of tying up in there for any length of time. I don't wonder Joe Bunker wanted to get away."

"All the same, this is our road," replied Ned. "See, the canyon is marked down on the map plain enough. We've got to follow it up a thousand yards, and that will bring us to the diggings. It's a splendid outlook for gold!"

"Of course it is. This canyon is nothing but an old river bed, but there's going to be a lot of trouble working here."

Ned realized that fully. The sandy soil which formed the bottom of the canyon was frozen hard, and as there was no wood to be had nearer than the top of those towering walls where they could see trees growing, the outlook was anything but favorable.

Still what one had done another could do, and there was no doubt that they were on the right track, and that Joe Bunker's gold had come out of this gloomy canyon, which they now entered, pushing on as rapidly as possible, for they were anxious to get back to camp in time to bring their belongings up before the short day came to an end.

Following the windings of the canyon they came suddenly to the end of their journey. A great heap of sand piled up, showed them that they had reached the place where Joe Bunker's operations had been carried on.

"The prospect hole at last!" cried Ned. "You see it?"

"I'd be blind if I didn't," replied the Unknown. "Yes, here we are! Here's one hole and over there is the other, and by the Jumping Jeremiah, there's wood enough to burn out twenty more."

This was a fortunate discovery. Old Joe Bunker had evidently gone to work in a systematic way, beginning by cutting wood on the heights above and tumbling the trees down into the canyon.

The two prospect holes were each about twenty feet deep, and what made the location still more favorable for gold digging was a stream of water issuing from the rocks just beyond the first shaft. It flowed down the canyon a short distance, and then lost itself in a crevice in the rocky wall, passing in underground like many others of these mountain streams.

Between the two shafts was a sizable cave opening in under the cliff. This was marked on the map also and was where Joe Bunker and the Habitant had lived. Ned and the Unknown went in and examined it, finding many traces of its previous occupants.

"It's a splendid place to tie up in," declared the detective. "Couldn't be better now that the nights are getting cool. We can live as snug as you please in here, dear boy, and I say let's take possession of it at once."

There was nothing else to be done, so Young Klondike and the Unknown now returned down the

mountain and the remainder of the day was spent in getting the goods up to the cave.

Everything was now arranged for a stay of several weeks, if the weather remained favorable, as it now seemed likely might be the case, for it was growing warmer, and the storm which threatened seemed to have moved off in some other direction.

Night found them comfortably established in the cave, and all retired early, except Dick, who was to take first watch.

Ned slept like a log until midnight, when Dick called him.

As he flashed the lantern in his face, Young Klondike roused instantly.

"What in the world is the matter, Dick?" he exclaimed. "You look scared half out of your wits. One would think you had seen your grandmother's ghost."

"Does my face give me away so bad as all that?" asked Dick. "Upon my word I didn't think it! I ain't as much scared though as I am perplexed."

"At what?"

"There's something strange about this place, Ned—something very strange. I've been trying for an hour and over to make it out."

"Make what out? What is it? Why in thunder didn't you call me before if there's anything going wrong?"

"It ain't that anything is going wrong. I haven't seen a living thing, but——"

"Thunder, Dick! Will you tell it? I'm just dying to know what you are driving at! If there's anything wrong you ought to have called me before!"

"Oh, I didn't want to disturb you, Ned. Come with me. I can show you better than I can explain."

Dick led the way up the canyon. As they turned around a projecting cliff, which marked its next winding, a dull ringing sound fell upon Young Klondike's ear.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, stopping short.

"There you are," replied Dick. "That's what's bothering me. Do you hear it? It's been going on for an hour. If you can make out what it is you can do more than I've been able to do, but that's not all."

"Sounds to me like someone striking on a drill," said Ned, greatly puzzled. "Can it be that there's anyone working in here?"

"That's what I've been asking myself for the last hour. Come here, Ned; put your ear against the rock and listen. Right here—so!"

Ned pressed his ear against the rock and immediately gave an exclamation of amazement.

"Why, I can hear people talking," he said.

"That's what! Can you make out what they are saying though?"

"No, I can't."

"Nor I either."

"It's all a jumble, but I certainly hear voices."

"To be sure you do. We are not alone here. There's someone working behind those rocks; you can

explain it in any way you like, but there's the fact plain enough."

It was certainly very strange and could only be accounted for by imagining a cave behind the rocks, something very difficult to believe, for the wall of the canyon was the side of the mountain and towered to a height of several hundred feet above their heads.

"Joe Bunker couldn't have known this or he would certainly have mentioned it," said Ned, "he noted everything down so particularly. I can't imagine what it means."

"If they'd only speak a little louder," said Dick. "I can almost hear them. I—thunder! Did you get that, Ned?"

"Young Klondike!"

That is what Dick heard.

The words were distinctly spoken. Ned heard them, too.

"It's a cave," he declared, "and there are people working in there who know us. As soon as it's daylight we'll start in to explore. I've no doubt we shall easily solve the mystery."

It was easy said, but it did not turn out that way.

When morning came Edith and the Unknown were introduced to the mystery. They also heard the voices and the ring of hammers upon a drill. As soon as breakfast was over Ned and the Unknown went out of the canyon, and with great difficulty climbed further up the mountain until they came out on top of the wall.

Here they found a considerable stretch of broken land covered with loose rocks, a sort of shelf on the mountain side, with the main peak towering to a great height above them.

But there was no opening, no break in the rocky ledge anywhere.

It seemed just impossible that there could be a cave, unless the entrance was in the other side of the mountain.

"I wonder why they call this Mad Mountain?" remarked the Unknown, and Ned had been wondering, too; wondering whether it could have anything to do with the mysterious voices which were still plainly to be heard when they came down into the canyon again, not a bit wiser than when they started out.

CHAPTER IV.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK.

So much time was wasted trying to solve the mystery of Mad Mountain that day that no work was done.

It was all to no purpose; the mystery still remained a mystery. The sounds were not continuous. At times they listened in vain for the voices, and the pounding on the drill was only heard at intervals, but it kept up until dark and then seemed to have stopped for the night, but at twelve o'clock when the

Unknown called Dick who was to stand second watch he reported that it had begun again.

"They are still at it," he said. "Come up and listen. Seems to me you can hear them plainer than you did awhile ago."

"How about the drilling?"

"Haven't heard that lately; maybe we can now, though."

They could not, however. Dick listened for a long while, hearing the voices from time to time.

"Can you make out anything?" asked the detective.

"No," said Dick. "I can't, and yet it seems as though I ought to."

"Are they talking now?"

"Now!" Dick heard the Unknown's last word distinctly pronounced behind the rock.

And yet it was not the echo. They had gone upon that theory before, and knew that it would not work.

Suddenly the voices ceased.

"I can hear a lot of men running!" exclaimed Dick.

The Unknown clapped his ear against the rock and declared that he could hear the footsteps, too.

"They are dusting out lively whoever they are," he said. "Now it's all quiet. Of course, there must be a cave in there, and by the Jumping Jeremiah, I'm going to get on to it, if it takes all winter."

The Unknown had scarcely spoken when a muffled explosion rang out through the canyon, and the ground trembled beneath their feet.

"Tremendous!" cried the Unknown. "That settles it, Dick! It's no imagination, it's——"

Again came the tremendous sound, and again and still again.

The very walls of the canyon seemed to shake.

Ned and Edith came running out of the cave awakened by the noise, but by the time they reached the spot it was all over.

There was no further explosion, and what was more puzzling still, the voices ceased to be heard.

All through that next day and three days following, the listeners listened in vain.

Perfect silence reigned in the canyon, except so far as such sounds as our Klondikers made themselves.

In spite of this new turn of the mystery, Ned started work up next morning.

"We ain't going to spend our whole time listening against the rocks," he declared. "For my part I've done enough of it. I'm here to find out where old Joe Bunker got his gold."

The first step was to do a little panning in the shafts.

Ned and Dick took one, and Edith and the Unknown tried the other, but the result was not nearly as satisfactory as they had hoped.

In the Unknown's shaft there was barely a color which did not improve any after some twenty pans were tried; indeed it seemed to grow poorer and poorer until at last there was no color at all.

Ned fared better at first.

There were two short drifts leading out of this shaft, and he took the one leading down the canyon first.

Washing out a pan he found quite a lot of small nuggets in the bottom and some flake gold, but the second pan proved to be far less rich, and the third poorer still.

This was about all the loose dirt there was in the drift, and they now started in to do a little digging which resulted in striking the ledge rock, and this, of course, brought them up with a round turn.

"We can't go any further here," said Dick. "We'd better tackle the other drift."

They did, and met with precisely the same result, striking rock before they had gone three feet.

"This is just a hole in the rock," declared Ned. "I'll bet you what you like, Dick, that we strike it in the bottom of the shaft, too."

"We might try it and see," suggested Dick. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised."

It was necessary to do a little burning in the bottom of the shaft, for there was some frost in the ground there.

By the time they were ready to put the fires out the Unknown and Edith had given up their shaft altogether.

"It's worthless," declared the detective. "There ain't a bit of use in going any further with it. We'll take hold and help here."

Work went faster after that; Ned and Dick plied the pick and shovel in the bottom of the shaft, the Unknown hoisted, and Edith took the pan.

"This is all right!" she called, after the first washing, "there's at least three ounces here."

Certainly this was encouraging, and as the second and third pans turned out equally well, the boys were just beginning to think that they had struck it rich, when all at once the bottom was knocked out of their hopes by striking the rock in the shaft.

That ended it.

The place was only a pocket after all.

All there was in it of any value Joe Bunker had taken out.

As for the other shaft, it wasn't worth working, and the day ended in disappointment.

Next morning Ned made a careful survey of that part of the canyon, and selecting a place which looked favorable, started to burn out another shaft.

This took all day.

By night they had scarcely passed below the frost line.

Two days' work followed, and they succeeded in putting it down to the sand, where, according to all theory, the gold ought to be, if there was any, but in this case there wasn't any, so they had their labor for their pains.

There were no sounds heard at the "talking rock" that day, as Ned dubbed the mysterious cliff, and through the night the same silence reigned.

This only served to make the mystery deeper, but there was no way of solving it, and the Unknown

seemed to have forgotten his promise to take the matter in hand.

At least they thought so when they turned in for the night, but when daylight came the detective was missing.

Dick, who had been on the watch the last part of the night, declared that he had not seen him leave the cave.

If it had been anybody but the Unknown, this might have created some alarm, but all were well used to the detective's singular ways. It was just like him to steal off in this fashion, so there was nothing to worry about, but Young Klondike was a good deal vexed just the same.

"Confound him! What did he want to go off just now for?" he exclaimed. "I'd made up my mind to give it up here and push further up the canyon, and I'm going to do it, too!"

"We've got to strike in somewhere else, that's sure," said Dick. "It's nothing but a waste of time to stay here."

"That's what's the matter. Still we can hang to the cave for the present. We won't disturb anything, but just push on up the canyon and see what we strike."

They started off right after breakfast leaving a note in the cave telling the Unknown in which direction they had gone.

For a full hour they followed the windings of the canyon. This strange break in the mountains seemed interminable. At the end of that time the conditions had not changed a bit. Ned could not help wondering where the canyon ended, but he did not care to follow it much further without the Unknown.

Fortunately, however, he did not give it up just then, for a walk of fifteen minutes brought them out into a vast sink. Here the walls of rock receded on all sides leaving a level plain well wooded with a stream running through it. About half a mile further on they could see that the canyon began again, but they did not cross to it, for nothing could offer better prospects for gold digging than this sink.

"This is the place for us!" cried Young Klondike. "If there's any gold at all in Mad Mountain it's here."

"Shall we make a try for it now?" asked Edith.

"Certainly," replied Ned. "That's what we are here for. We'll tackle the bed of the stream; there won't be time to do much digging. If there is any color in this dirt at all it ought to show in the loose sand under the water here."

Having eaten their lunch, Ned and Dick took off their shoes and stockings and went right at it in the water.

This is the simplest sort of panning.

The sand under the beds of creeks is never frozen at this season, and work is comparatively easy as far as it goes.

"Now for a touch of your old luck, Dick!" cried Ned. "The first pan shall be yours."

Dick bent down and scooped up a pan full of sand out of the water, which was about knee deep.

"Hooray! I've struck it first dip!" he cried. "Look! What do you say to that?"

It needed no spectacles to see the gold in Dick's pan.

The sand fairly bristled with nuggets.

They were all small, not bigger than peas, but they were there, and there was a lot of them.

Dick washed off the sand, and there was at least six ounces of nuggets and flake gold left in the pan.

"That's immense!" cried Edith. "Ned, it will pay to turn this stream and work right here, I should say."

"It certainly looks so," replied Ned, who was shaking away at his own pan.

"How is yours?"

"Seems to be just about the same as Dick's. There's certainly a lot of gold here."

There was fully four ounces, and that is a big yield for the bed of a small stream like this.

But this was only the beginning.

Pan after pan was washed out, and there was little difference between them.

They ran from two to seven ounces as near as could be estimated.

Inside of an hour our Klondikers had nearly a thousand dollars, and still there seemed to be no falling off in the yield.

"This knocks Joe Bunker's diggings all hollow," declared Ned. "I don't want any better claim than this."

"Then that means we locate here?" asked Edith.

"For the present, yes; most decidedly. I don't ask for anything better, but I think we've done about enough now."

"Strange Zed hasn't shown up," remarked Dick. "I made sure that he'd come tumbling in on us by this time."

"So did I. Don't believe we are going to see him though."

And indeed it looked so then, and still more so when they returned to the cave.

The night passed, and the Unknown did not return.

It was an anxious time. Neither Ned nor Dick dared to sleep long, and after midnight both remained on the watch together.

Naturally they listened at the talking rock.

All was as silent here as though the voices had never been heard.

Next morning they returned to "Golden Valley," as Edith named the site of the new diggings.

A day's work was done here which proved one of the red letter days, as far as gold was concerned.

Over twenty-three hundred dollars was taken out of the bed of the stream.

Night came again, and no news of the Unknown.

"It won't do. We've got to look him up at once," declared Young Klondike, as they shouldered their gold bags and traveled back toward the cave, loaded down with the precious dust.

It seemed very provoking just as they were getting down to work.

The valley seemed to be enveloped in mystery.

First it was one thing and then another.

As they approached the cave they were suddenly startled at seeing a man standing at the entrance looking toward them.

It was almost dusk and one could not see very distinctly, yet anyone could tell that this was not the Unknown.

"Who is it?" said Ned, stopping short, for here in the wilderness it was an even chance if the man was friend or foe.

"Blest if I can tell you," replied Dick, "he's got his back turned."

"Do you know who he reminds me of?" asked Edith.

"Joe Bunker!" cried Ned and Dick in a breath.

Suddenly the man turned and faced them.

Any one could see the resemblance now.

It was either old Joe Bunker or his ghost.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SIXTH MAP EXPLAINED.

OF course our Klondikers were startled.

How could it be otherwise when they saw standing before them a man whom they knew to be dead and had buried with their own hands?

Still ghosts are not supposed to appear in daylight, and as neither of the boys believed in ghosts at all, they hurried forward to investigate the mystery, but after all arrived at the cave too late.

The instant the man saw them coming he turned, went into the cave, and vanished.

"Hello there! Hold up! We want to speak to you!" shouted Ned.

He flung down the gold bag, grasped his rifle tighter, and started on the run.

Dick joined him, and they were at the cave in a jiffy, but too late to find their man.

The mysterious stranger had vanished, and that meant more mystery, for he certainly had gone into the cave, and not gone out of it, unless, indeed, by some secret way.

When Edith came she found the boys standing at the entrance to the cave looking very much puzzled.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"Blest if I know!" replied Ned. "There's more to this place than we know yet. He went into the cave all right, but you can see for yourself that he ain't here now."

"Hello! Here's something!" cried Dick, going to the big, flat stone on one side of the cave which they had used for a table.

Here he picked up a paper upon which a small stone had been placed.

"A letter!" exclaimed Edith.

"That's what. Listen to it," replied Dick, and he read as follows:

"YOUNG KLONDIKE,—You won't be allowed to stay here and work a claim. This mountain is ours, but I don't want to see you or yours get into trouble, for I understand that you were kind to my dead brother and buried him, for which you have my sincere thanks. Your friend is in trouble and a prisoner. I do not wish him to be harmed, but I dare not make a move. Come to me to-night any time after twelve o'clock. Take the third line shown on the sixth map and I will meet you. I trust to your honor to leave the valley immediately after your friend is restored to you. The way out of the cave is open. Be cautious how you show your light. Yours,

"SAM BUNKER, (brother of Joe.)"

"Come, that's business!" cried Ned. "Whoever this man is he evidently means to be our friend."

"That's right," said Dick. "It looks as though the Unknown had struck more than he bargained for, too. Of course we've got to act on this, but as to abandoning our claim we'll have to think about it. I don't know that we are bound to get up and dust just because Joe Bunker's brother wants it to be so."

"Not with such a rich prospect on hand as we've just struck," replied Ned. "But what does he mean about the way out of the cave being open? Of course it don't refer to the main opening. We must investigate this."

The cave ran well back under the rocks, but the roof was so low that no attempt had been made to explore it until now. Ned lighted the lantern and all crawled in under the rocks.

They had not far to go before it was discovered that there was as little difficulty in a man leaving the cave by the back way as by the front.

Just as it seemed impossible to penetrate any further under the rocks the cave suddenly widened out.

The roof was invisible now, nor could they see the sides. Here was a vast underground opening which ran in under the mountain for an unknown distance. "Well!" exclaimed Ned, "here's one mystery explained at all events. We know now why it was that we did not see the Unknown go."

This was certainly clear enough. There could be little doubt that the detective had left the cave in this way.

Now came the question how to act.

Ned was so impatient that he wanted to go on with the exploration then and there, but Dick on the other hand thought that they ought to follow the letter, and Edith was decidedly of the same mind.

It took not a little persuasion to make Ned yield, but he gave up in the end.

"I suppose it is best," he said. "If old Joe Bunker had a brother—and who can doubt it after what

we saw—I suppose we had better tie to him, and yet after all it may be only a trap to catch us, too."

Now this was just what Dick would not believe.

He argued that if the man had really meant them harm he could have taken some other way of showing it.

It wound up in a wait; they ate supper and having hidden the gold under a pile of stones, made themselves as comfortable as they could till midnight, the appointed time.

During this wait Ned studied the sixth map again with the greatest care, but could make nothing of it.

"Don't you fret," said Dick. "It will explain itself as we go on, I'm sure of it. The other maps all mean something and I don't see why it should be different with this."

Dick was quite right, and it did not take them long to find it out, once they got fairly started on that midnight exploring tour.

In spite of the caution in the letter about the light they took the lantern with them—they had to; it would have been quite impossible to get along in any other way.

Once in the cavern, the question was which way to go. This was easier settled than they thought it was going to be, for the floor of the cavern was sandy, and when they came to examine, there were footprints leading straight forward.

"A trail! We've struck it!" exclaimed Ned. "We are all right now."

They hurried forward, and in a few moments saw the end of the cavern before them. The walls closed in as suddenly as they had opened, and beyond there was only a narrow, tunnel-like passage leading off under the rocks.

The trail led them into the passage, so there could be no doubt that they were going right.

"This is the talk!" exclaimed Ned; "we are making good progress, but I don't see yet where the sixth map comes in."

"Be patient. We'll soon know," said Edith. "Remember our object. If Zed is in trouble we are the ones to help him!"

"As though I ever could have forgotten it!" cried Ned. "To help him I'd follow this passage on to its end, if I knew that it was going to lead me to my death."

For about ten minutes they continued on; the passage grew winding; other passages opened off here and there.

Mad Mountain apparently was honey-combed with caves. It was easy to understand the mystery of the voices now, and the mystery of the sixth map was about to be explained.

Suddenly the passage ended, and they came out under the starlight, facing a rock formation, which would have driven a geologist crazy with delight.

It was what is known as a "chimney;" in other words an immense natural shaft in the mountain. On all sides the rocks towered above them, surrounding a circular opening perhaps a hundred feet across.

"The circle of the sixth map!" exclaimed Ned, as they stood looking in on the singular break.

"That's what it is," echoed Dick, "and the lines on the map just mean tunnels. We've come through one of them and there are others of course."

The explanation was correct. The briefest examination dispelled the mystery of the sixth map.

Tunnels opened off from the chimney on all sides.

There were so many of them that one could scarcely tell which was which, for to understand this it was necessary to know how old Joe Bunker had stood when he made his map.

One thing was certain, the old prospector had only told half his story.

Very probably he meant to tell more of it, and would have done so if he had lived.

"We must make some kind of a screen for our lantern before we go any further," declared Ned; "everything is coming out straight, and we can't doubt now that we shall see this Sam Bunker in a few moments. We want to do just as he says."

"If we only had a piece of black cloth to tie around one side we might make a dark lantern of it," suggested Dick.

"Which we haven't. I guess the best way will be to put it in my hat and carry it so."

"A big nuisance, but that will do the business. Here, let me carry it. I know you want to take the lead, and I'd just as soon you would."

"I'd just as soon somebody would tell me which tunnel to take," remarked Ned, as he handed over the lantern; "that's what's bothering me."

He took out the map, and Dick holding the lantern, he began studying it again.

"It seems to me that Joe Bunker probably came in the same way we have come," said Edith, "and if that is the case, then this line at the top of the map ought to mean a tunnel exactly opposite to where we are standing now."

"That's reasonable."

"Call that No. 1, and then all you have to do is to take the third line, and you'll have the tunnel we want."

"Exactly; but do we take the third line on the right or the third line on the left?"

"That's the puzzle. The letter says nothing about it?"

"Not a word."

"Strange, too. You'd have supposed he would have mentioned it."

"Let's see," said Dick. "By going to the right it would lead us out toward the canyon. That's where we heard the voices, and that would seem to be the most likely way."

"We can only try it; if we don't hit it on the right we'll take the left."

They passed the mouths of six tunnels as they went around the chimney on the left hand side.

Apparently there was no end to these dark openings. They went in under those giant cliffs and were lost in the gloom.

It seemed hard to believe that this was Nature's work, and yet such was certainly the case.

Coming to a point directly opposite the tunnel by which they had entered, they found another just as they expected.

It was larger than the rest, and Ned felt satisfied that this was the point of beginning, for when he came to consult the map he found that the line here was heavier.

"No," said Dick.

"Right you are," answered Ned. "Now for No. 3."

When they reached the third opening on the right they found it so narrow that they could hardly walk two abreast.

Great care was now taken to conceal the light, and they advanced with all caution for several hundred yards.

The passage seemed to run straight toward the canyon, but it grew narrower and at last it became so narrow that Ned had to walk sideways in order to get through.

"I don't like this," he said. "If we are attacked and have to run for it there will be no fun in making a retreat here."

"Hadn't we better wait?" suggested Edith. "If we expect to see this Sam Bunker now ought to be the time."

"No; I'm going forward," declared Ned. "I can't hold back. I'm that uneasy about the Unknown that it seems as if—hark! What was that?"

Something fell with a crash. It sounded like a big mass of rock and the sound came from a distance further along the narrow trail.

Ned worked his way on sideways, moving practically in the dark, for Dick kept the lantern well concealed in his hat.

Suddenly there was another crash.

Stones seemed to be rushing down from a height. Crash followed crash and then all was still.

"There's something wrong," said Ned. "I don't believe this is part of the programme. Shall we go back?"

"Thought you were determined to go forward?" replied Dick.

"Yes, but I don't want to lead you into trouble."

"Don't worry about me," said Edith. "We'd better push it through to the end."

The end was not far distant. A few steps further brought them out into another cavern, and to the surprise of all they came into the light.

We must stop to describe this singular place which seemed to be entirely deserted, although there was evidence enough that it could not have been long in that condition.

It was a big cave, surmounted by a dome shaped roof, which made it look like the interior of some vast cathedral, the illusion being rendered more perfect by the rocky pillars all around the sides, and the immense stalactites which hung down from the roof glittering as though studded with gems in the light

of three large reflecting lanterns which hung against the pillars on the sides of the cave.

In the center of the open space was a mining shaft, which proved upon examination to be some twenty-five feet deep, with two drifts opening off from it.

There were mining tools scattered about, and near the bank of a little stream which ran through the cave, was a heap of golden nuggets. Panning had evidently been going on here on an extended scale, as the nuggets and the sand heaps near them—the "tailings," as what is washed out that is not gold is termed. Then over in one corner of the cave was a regular camp. Bunks were built up against the rock; there was a rude table here and several stools; there were dishes on the table with the remains of a meal, and nearby was a fire with a bright iron pot suspended over it from three forked stakes, which contained a savory stew.

All this Young Klondike and his friends took in almost at a glance, and it is hardly necessary to say that they looked around sharply for the occupants of the cave, but not a soul was to be seen.

"This beats the band," said Dick at last. "Of course this is the place where we heard the voices—it must be! But where are they all now?"

"Tell me and I'll tell you," replied Ned. "But there's one thing certain—they ain't long gone, and Sam Bunker hasn't met us as he agreed."

"That's two things," said Edith, "and I don't see that either of them helps us any. What's been going on over there? They seem to have been trying to blast away the rock?"

The place which Edith referred to was the extreme end of the cave, where a great heap of loose stone lay.

They went over to it and saw that it had recently been blasted out. There were drills and hammers lying around and a box of rend rock cartridges and a coil of fuse.

"I tell you what it is!" exclaimed Ned, "they are trying to blast out into the canyon and I don't wonder if anything should happen to close up that passage this would be a regular death trap; you can see that for yourself, Dick."

Unconsciously Young Klondike raised his voice and spoke louder than he intended.

"Dick! Dick!"

Dick's name was suddenly repeated and yet they had heard no echo before.

"What was that?" exclaimed Edith.

"Hello, Young Klondike! Hello!"

Again the mysterious voice spoke.

It was surely no echo this time. The sound seemed to come from beyond the rocky wall.

"Thunder! We are on the other side of the talking rock!" cried Ned. "That's what it is! Hello, there! Hello! Who are you?"

The answer was prompt and distinct:

"I am the Unknown!"

CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT IN THE DEATH TRAP.

"THREE cheers for our side! That's old Zed's voice!" Young Klondike exclaimed.

"You bet it is!" came the answer. "Ye gods and little fishes! I had to fight for it to get out myself, and now I've got to get you out if I can."

It was wonderful to hear the Unknown's voice so distinctly, and yet not be able to see him or even to have a clear idea where he was.

"Hello, Zed! Hello!" Ned cried. "Where are you, old man?"

"In the canyon! Why in thunder didn't you stay out?"

"We were hunting you."

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, ain't I of age! Ain't I able to take care of myself? Are you prisoners in there same as I was? If you are it serves you right."

They were all close to the wall listening, and it was astonishing how plainly they could hear.

"We ain't prisoners; there ain't anybody here but ourselves!" Ned called back. "Tell us what to do."

"How did you get in?"

"Through the cave, same as you did, I suppose. How did you get out?"

"I could never make you understand, because I don't know myself. You'll be surprised when I tell you that old man Bunker's brother was my guide."

"He was, eh? Then I wish he'd come and guide us. He was to meet us here."

"You have seen him?"

"Yes—no. We saw him in the cave, but didn't get a chance to speak to him. He wrote us that he would meet us here, but he hasn't shown up yet."

"And do you mean to tell me there is nobody in there?"

"Not at all. We are in here; Dick's somebody and so is Edith, I guess. I don't make any account of myself."

"Quit your fooling, Ned; this is a very serious business. When I left the place where you are now there were at least twenty men sleeping in the bunks and around the fire; where they can all have gone to I can't imagine, but you can bet your life they haven't gone far."

"Who were they?"

"Don't know. A gang of toughs of the worst kind; they have struck a thundering rich mine in there as I suppose you know."

"Then you are all right?"

"Right as the mail. I've just been down to the cave. I was knocked all about by finding you gone; you had better get back just as soon as you can."

"Yes, but how are we going to do it? Return by the way we came?"

"You'll have to. I can't help you any."

"And yet you say Joe Bunker's brother brought you out another way."

"Yes—blindfolded."

"Then you don't know how you got out?"

"Not at all."

"Do you know how you got in?"

"There you go again with your nonsense! Didn't I go in through our cave, same as you did. I told you I'd solve the mystery of the talking rock."

"And you did?"

"You bet I did! I solved it with a vengeance. Those fellows captured me; it's a wonder they didn't kill me. They'll go for us, Ned. They swear we shall never stay and work on Mad Mountain. The game ain't worth the candle; we'd better light right out."

"Who says it ain't worth the candle? You don't know what we've found since you've been gone."

"What?"

"We've struck the richest kind of digging. Cleaned up nearly four thousand dollars."

"Where?"

"Further up the canyon."

"'Twon't be a bit of use. Those fellows will down us in the end. I tell you, dear boy, they are toughs from Toughtown and don't you forget it; but say, Ned, you really mustn't talk any more. I can't allow it! You run a fearful risk."

"Tell us what became of Joe Bunker's brother, then we'll go."

"Don't know—can't tell you. Drop it! Git, now, before those fellows come back."

The Unknown was evidently in fearful earnest, and so Ned shouted out that they would at once make a start.

But he couldn't resist the temptation to stop at the shaft and take a look.

"I'd like to know how the pay dirt looks down there in those drifts," he said; "this formation is so peculiar that I want to understand it, just as a lesson in mining, you know."

"You may get a lesson in common sense before you are through if you waste any more time here," said Dick. "I say let's go on right now."

"Just a minute—it won't take more," Ned persisted.

There was an ordinary windlass over the shaft, and Ned seized the rope and was about to swing himself down into the hole, when all at once there was a fearful crash and a great mass of loose rock came whirling down from the ceiling breaking into a thousand fragments almost at their feet.

"Great Jerusalem! I don't stay here any longer!" cried Dick. "Come, Edith! Come!"

He seized her hand and hurried her toward the entrance to the tunnel, loose pieces of rock falling all about them as they went.

"Stop there! Halt or you're a dead man, Young Klondike?"

The cry was shouted out before they had half reached the mouth of the tunnel.

It came from above.

Naturally they halted and looked up against the wall of the cave in the direction of the sound.

There stood about a dozen men covering them with rifles.

They were rough, villainous-looking fellows all, and among them were two whom Young Klondike recognized as well-known Dawson City toughs. A tall man, with a gray beard, was there, too. It was Joe Bunker's brother, the man they had seen at the entrance to the cave.

"Stop or you die!" he shouted. "Don't you budge an inch till we come down!"

"A trap!" gasped Dick. "I was afraid of this."

To have attempted to fire would have been death.

There was nothing for it but to stand their ground, and take whatever chance might send to them.

Four of the men held them covered while the rest hurried back out of sight.

They could be heard scrambling over the rocks and capture seemed only the matter of a moment, when a fearful thing occurred which instantly put a different face on the whole affair.

A sharp cracking sound, followed by a thunderous report was the only warning, and down from the roof of the cave came a vast mass of rock, crashing, breaking into thousands of fragments, tearing its way past our Klondikers who, thrown down by the shock, could only cling desperately to each other expecting death every instant, and yet death did not come.

Above the roar of that terrible collapse they could hear the cries of the men who but a moment before had threatened their lives.

Whether they would ever threaten them again was doubtful; it was doubtful if they still lived, for in the awful hush which followed they could not hear a sound.

It was all over in a moment.

Surrounded by the fallen mass, Young Klondike and his companions remained unharmed, and that was the miracle of it. Why they were not killed instantly was more of a mystery than all the other mysteries of Mad Mountain put together, but so it was.

Young Klondike's death trap had been suddenly sprung, and with Dick and Edith he was fairly caught in it. What the end of this strange adventure was to be, or what the cause, no man could tell.

Collapses in caves are of frequent occurrence. Some geologists claim that they are caused by the shrinkage of the earth's crust; others maintain that it is the result of water action in the seams of the rocks. What the truth is nobody knows.

It took time for Ned and his friends to recover from the shock, and to realize that they were still alive.

It was no time for talk, and as they scrambled to their feet, no one spoke.

As much as they thought at all, they expected another crash, and stood silently waiting for it to come.

Of course, the big lanterns had gone out and they were now in darkness, which made it all the more

alarming. Even the voices of their enemies would have been a relief, but these were not heard either.

As he stood there Ned felt certain that the men must have perished—certainly there seemed no other explanation of their silence then.

"Ned, this is an awful thing," breathed Dick, breaking the silence at last.

"Tremendous! Edith, you are all right? You are sure of that?"

"All right, Ned. Nothing the matter with me, but I'm afraid those men are dead."

"We've got all we can attend to without thinking of them."

"Yes, but it's a fearful death to die."

"They would have killed us! It was all a trap—a death trap. But we must not stand here—there will be another drop presently. We must make a move."

"Wait a minute and I'll light the lantern," said Dick.

"Have you got it?"

"Yes. I managed to hold on to it, but it went out when I went down."

"Got a match?"

"Yes; I'll have a light in two shakes. Then we can see where we are at. Now, then—that's better. Great heavens, Ned, we are hemmed in all around!"

It was indeed so.

A vast quantity of rock had fallen, and it lay piled up on all sides of them.

If they had advanced three feet further across the cave, instant death must have been the result, but behind for some distance the way was clear.

There was little or no rock near the shaft, and the stream flowed on as peacefully as ever. Over by the wall, where they had talked with the Unknown, some rock had fallen but not very much.

Ned's first thought now was of the detective, and they hurried back to the wall and called and called, but received no answer.

"Good Heavens! Can there have been a crash out in the canyon, too?" he groaned.

"Don't believe it and won't until I know it," said Dick. "Zed has probably gone back to the cave."

"And how are we to get back there? The tunnel is all choked up now."

"That's what's the matter. I'm afraid there is no doubt on that score."

"Then our way is cut off?"

"It looks so, but cheer up. There may be some way out of it. We are safe for the moment and must congratulate ourselves on that."

But were they safe for the moment?

Almost in the same breath down came another rush of rock rattling about the heads of Young Klondike and his friends.

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNKNOWN GETS INTO THE TRAP.

For a moment Ned, Dick and Edith stood motionless, waiting for the rocks which would bring death to one or all.

Fortunately they did not come.

It is not our painful duty to record any such tragedy.

In a moment it was all over for the time being, and our friends found themselves unharmed.

"This cuts us off a little further from the tunnel, that's all," said Ned, as cheerfully as he could speak. "But that makes no difference. Really we are not much worse off than we were before."

"That's right, never say die!" cried Edith. "Dick, don't you be discouraged. We've got into bad snaps before and got out of them again and we are going to get out of this."

"Oh, don't worry about me," said Dick. "I ain't any worse off than the rest of you."

"Now to work," said Ned. "We know from the Unknown that there is a way out of here which ain't the way we came in. We want to find that way and to do it we must first find the Unknown."

"If we can still make him hear," said Dick.

"No ifs. We are going to do it, but there's no use in all of us choosing the same dog."

"Right! What do you propose?"

"Just this—you take your place by the wall and stay there, trying your best to make the Unknown hear. He may have gone to the cave, and he may come back again. Watch and wait for him, for that's our only chance."

"Consider it done, Ned. Next!"

"Next I'll make a hunt for the way out. I'll examine every inch of the original wall of the cave that is left. Edith can take a look for provisions, which I don't doubt are stored away somewhere among the rocks near the fire there. We may have to stay here a long time, and of course we have got to live."

So they all went at it to make the best of the bad situation in which they now found themselves, and this, of course, was the most sensible thing they could do.

Dick took his place at the wall and called the Unknown again and again, and Dick's voice was penetrating and ought to make itself heard in the canyon if any voice could.

Ned took the walls—what was left of them—and slowly made the circuit of the cave.

Edith was the first to succeed.

"I've found the store-room!" she called out after a few moments. "It is packed full of stuff—enough to keep us for months. No danger of starvation now."

"Good enough!" called Ned. "I can only report progress. I haven't struck anything yet."

"Same here," said Dick, "but I'm going to keep right at it. You needn't expect anything though."

Now it was just like Dick to take a downcast view

of such matters, but within a minute he was shown his mistake.

"Hello there, Zed! Hello! Hello! Hello!" he shouted.

"Hello!" came back the answer. "Hello! That you, Dick!"

Of course Dick lost no time in making it very plain that it was himself and no one else, and the joyful news was reported to Ned and Edith, who hurried to the place to find Dick explaining to the Unknown what had occurred.

The detective had gone back to the cave with the idea of meeting them, just as Ned supposed.

Hearing the crash he hurried on to find the way through the tunnels completely cut off, and then realizing what it all meant, he lost no time in getting back to the talking rock.

Now with the rock between them the situation was fully discussed.

"If I only knew how old Bunker's brother got me out," groaned the detective, "then I could help you, but as it is I'm as helpless as a child."

"Can't you think?" asked Ned. "Can't you form any idea?"

"No, I can't. It is impossible. I only know that when he removed the bandage I found myself further up the canyon."

"Do you remember the exact spot?"

"Why, of course."

"Go there and have a look, then."

"That I can do and will, but I'm afraid it won't amount to anything, Ned."

"Try it—try it! If you can get in we can get out, and that's what we are after. You haven't seen anything of the enemy out there?"

"Not a thing. I don't believe one of them escaped, from what you say."

"Probably not. Well, we shouldn't have escaped if Mr. Sam Bunker and his friends had lived."

"Don't blame Sam Bunker, Ned, for to tell you the truth I don't believe he was to blame."

"How can it be otherwise? You ought to have heard him threaten us."

"I know all that, but remember he set me free and promised the same to you. Probably he couldn't help himself when he threatened you as you say he did."

They were still talking when another crash was heard, and there was another tremendous fall of rock.

This time it was away over on the other side of the cave, where the first fall had taken place, and did not come near Young Klondike's party.

"Are you at it again in there?" shouted the Unknown, as soon as the noise had ceased. "Are you safe, boys? Hello, hello!"

"We are all right," answered Ned. "Don't you worry about us. How did it sound outside there?"

"As though there was an earthquake. By the Jumping Jeremiah, it's maddening to be here, and

not to be able to get at you. Has much come down?"

"Lots, but it was all over on the other side of the cave; go on, Zed! See what you can find. You may be able to strike the place. At least it can do no harm to make the attempt."

"I'm gone," replied the detective, and then all was still.

It was just then that Edith made her great discovery. Looking up she saw the stars.

The roof of the cave had fallen in, leaving an opening which as they now saw it looked to be about ten feet across.

In the first moment of the discovery it seemed to Ned as if this might be a means of escape, but he soon saw that it was not so.

The opening was fully two hundred feet above them.

There was no possible chance of getting up to it, but there was one good thing—it would let daylight in.

As soon as the sun rose they would no longer be in the dark.

Pretty soon the Unknown came back and reported failure.

"I can't find it!" he called; "but there's one thing about it, I came down the rocks just before Sam Bunker took the bandage off, and I see there is a way of getting up right there."

"Go up and see what it means, then," said Ned.

"Can't! It would be as much as my life is worth to do it in the dark, but just as soon as it's daylight I'll make the attempt."

And so the first attempts at escape began and ended.

There was nothing to do but wait.

While they waited Ned finished his exploration of the walls and reported failure.

Edith, however, made a find which certainly helped matters along.

This was a big lantern like the ones which had been struck down by the falling rock.

Of course they lost no time in lighting it and Dick replenished the fire from a heap of dry wood which lay nearby, and then Edith prepared a good breakfast of coffee and canned meat, which they ate over by the wall where they could talk to the Unknown.

At last the sun rose and daylight filled the cave.

Things began to look brighter. It gave them hope to be able to see each other's faces in broad daylight, and they were still more encouraged when the Unknown announced that he would now try to climb the mountain and see if he could find the opening further up on the rocks.

"And it ought to be there," he declared. "From what you say this side of the cave don't seem to have changed at all."

He was gone a moment later and half an hour passed and he had made no sign.

Meanwhile, Ned proposed that they should examine the shaft.

"There's plenty of gold down there I don't doubt," said Dick, "but what good will it do us unless we can get out of this death trap?"

"Which we are going to do," replied Edith, emphatically.

"You speak as though you were very sure. I wish I could see the way."

"There now, Dick, don't you be discouraged. There's no use in that."

"Well, I won't," said Dick. "I'll try and look on the bright side of it all, and I suppose we might better work than sit idle."

"Why of course."

"Go ahead then and I'll let you down into the shaft."

It did not take Ned long to get ready. Dick took the windlass and he jumped into the tub and was lowered down.

Then a pick and shovel were let down to him and a good big sample of the sand which composed the bottom of the shaft was sent up.

"I'an her out!" called Ned. "I'll tackle one of the drifts while you are at it. I suspect that's where the gold came from."

"There don't seem to be much in this," said Dick.

"No," replied Ned, "I know there can't be. I can't see a trace of nuggets. There may be some flake gold though."

"I'll do the panning," said Edith. "Dick, you stay here and watch the windlass. Ned may want to come up in a hurry, for all we can tell."

"Better let me have the lantern. I can't see much in the drifts!" called Ned, and Dick lowered it down.

Ned took it, and carrying his pick and shovel with him, disappeared in one of the drifts, while Edith went down to the stream to work the pan.

It did not take her long to shake out the sand, for Edith had become quite expert at panning by this time.

"There's a color here, but that's about all," she reported to Dick. "I shouldn't think there was half an ounce, if there is that."

"All right! So much the less temptation for us to stay here in case we are lucky enough to have a chance to get out," replied Dick.

"Where's Ned? Still in the drift?"

"Yes."

"You can hear him working?"

"No. It probably runs in further than we thought."

This silence seemed to worry Edith a little, but by the time she got over to the shaft Ned was just coming out of the drift.

"It's better in there!" he called. "There are some nuggets, but still it's no great shakes."

"Going to send up a sample?" asked Dick.

"I should say it wasn't worth while at all if we had anything else to do, but as we haven't I suppose we may as well."

So Ned returned to the drift and brought out sev-

eral shovelful of the sand and loaded it into the tub.

"How about the other drift?" asked Dick, as he hoisted away.

"I'll tackle that later. I'm coming up to see how this lot pans out. Dump your bucket, Dick, and then give me a hoist."

Dick lost no time in obeying, and then let the bucket down for Ned, raising him to the ground.

The sand was shoveled into the pan, and Ned and Edith went to the stream to wash it out, but Dick, for some unexplained reason, remained behind.

"Why don't you come over here?" called Ned. "What are you staying there for?"

He did not look around as he spoke, or he would have seen Dick bending over the shaft in a listening attitude.

What did he hear?

Suddenly Ned heard the windlass creak and the tub going down.

"What in thunder are you about, Dick?" he called, looking around now.

"Hooray!" shouted Dick, beginning to wind up the rope.

"Hooray! I'm in the death trap!" cried a voice down the shaft.

Ned dropped the pan and ran with Edith toward the shaft. Up came the tub and in it stood the Unknown holding up a big nugget of gold.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIG FIND IN THE LITTLE CAVE.

It took the Unknown just about two seconds to get out of the tub and then there was a great handshaking all around.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, it takes me to do the business," cried the detective, proudly. "Didn't I tell you I'd find the way? Ye gods and little fishes, I've done it! You bet I have!"

"You didn't tell us anything of the sort, but just the same I'm mighty glad you've found it," replied Ned. "Tell us about it. Is it all plain sailing out of here?"

"You bet! No trouble now! I'll have you in the canyon in just about two shakes."

This was cheerful news. Next question was how did the Unknown get into the shaft, which he immediately answered by explaining that he came through the other drift which led into a smaller cave.

"And from there the way is clear right out into the canyon," he added. "No trouble at all about it, boys. Unless things change before we can get back, there's nothing to hinder us from going straight back to our own cave."

The bare suggestion was enough to send them along in a hurry.

Hastily collecting a few articles from the supply of provisions in the store-room among the rocks, they all went down into the shaft and the Unknown led the way into the other drift.

Here they found that the drift had been put through a gravel bed for about sixteen feet, and a good deal of labor evidently expended upon it; at the end of this distance it suddenly joined with a natural tunnel in the bed rock, which extended off into the darkness as far as they could see.

"There you are!" cried the Unknown. "This was the way Sam Bunker led me, of course. Come on now to the little cave."

It was not necessary to ask about the little cave, for the tunnel proved to be only a small affair.

In a moment they came out into this cave, which was perhaps twenty feet across and a little longer than it was broad.

There was a marked difference between this and the larger cave in the matter of the roof, which here was so high up as to be invisible.

Roof there must be, Ned saw, for the cave was perfectly dark.

A small stream ran through the middle in a broad bed, showing that at times it was very much wider.

The bottom of this bed was of coarse, black sand, just such as gold is usually found in on the Klondike.

And any one familiar with Klondike conditions could see at a glance that there could be no better prospect for a rich find than right here.

"We'll tackle this place later," said Ned. "Hold your lantern down, Dick! By Jove, I thought I saw a nugget just then!"

"'Twouldn't be surprising if you did," replied the Unknown. "It was here that I found mine. What's it worth do you think, Ned?"

"About ten ounces."

"Good enough! I found it right here."

The Unknown hurried forward and pointed out the spot.

It seemed to be a lucky one, for Dick immediately stooped down and picked up another nugget as big as the one the detective had found.

Edith was equally lucky, for in a moment she had one, too, and it only remained for Ned to find one bigger than all the others, which he presently did.

Things were now looking decidedly brighter, and they looked brighter still when the detective led them by another tunnel out upon the rocks which skirted the canyon.

"Here we are!" cried Edith. "Now, wasn't I right, Dick? Didn't I tell you we'd get out of that death trap? I knew we would escape!"

But had they escaped?

It looked so then, but who can tell what the future has in store?

The story of Young Klondike's death trap is not all told yet by any means, but just then all hands were in a hurry to forget about it, and they descended the rocks and returned to the old cave where they had made their camp.

For the next few days the weather continued fine, and our Klondikers worked away in Golden Valley, dismissing the adventures in the death trap from their mind.

Nothing was seen or heard of the enemy.

Up at "talking rock" all was silence now.

In the good fortune which awaited them at Golden Valley the trials of that memorable night drifted into the past.

There never was a better mine struck than those diggings there in the stream.

One day it was two thousand dollars and over; next day it ran up as high as three thousand and then dropped to less than one, only to rise again to over four thousand, a yield which if kept up would soon mean another fortune piled on top of the one Golden & Luckey had already accumulated in the Klondike gold mines.

Sunday came and according to their usual custom they knocked off work and made it a day of rest.

In the afternoon they all went further up the mountain and tried to find the place where the roof of the big cave had fallen in, but did not succeed.

Just before they came to the spot where it ought to be they struck an impassable ledge, and were unable to get any further, and so had to give it up.

That night the Unknown suggested that they knock off work in Golden Valley for a few days, and try the stream in the little cave.

Nobody offered any objection.

In fact, Young Klondike felt no little curiosity to know how that same stream would pan out.

Besides this there was another reason for making the attempt.

Provisions were beginning to run short.

Young Klondike's party had not started out with the intention of making a long stay, and it would be necessary to take the homeward track, unless they drew upon the stores of the big cave.

"I don't see any reason why we shouldn't do it," said Ned. "There can't be any doubt that those fellows are all dead."

"Probably they are," said the detective. "If any of them were still living, we should certainly have heard from them—at least, it seems so to me."

When morning came there was still another reason for not working in Golden Valley, and it was a most excellent reason for giving up altogether and returning to Dawson City.

It began to snow in the night, and was coming down good and hard at daybreak.

To work in Golden Valley was impossible, and it was equally so to think of returning home until the storm was over, so Young Klondike and his friends naturally turned their attention to the cave.

They climbed up the mountain-side, and with picks and shovels and pans and the big reflecting lantern to work by, made their way through the tunnel into the little cave.

Nothing had changed since they left it. The break-up in the roof rock certainly had not extended here.

"We'll take a place in the old bed of the stream, as far back from the water as we can get," declared Ned. "Of course, we shall have to dam up a bit to keep the water from coming into the hole, but that won't take long, and it's our best chance for finding gold."

"Why not take the place where I found my nugget?" suggested the Unknown.

"As well there as anywhere. It answers my conditions perfectly."

So this was the place chosen, and the first work was to build a dam against the stream.

While piling up the sand for this purpose they took out nuggets which at guess weight ran as high as twenty ounces.

This, of course, was a good promise for what they might expect to find in the hole.

"We are going to strike it rich here!" declared the Unknown. "I feel it in my bones."

"If we don't do it to-day we never shall," replied Ned, emphatically. "It won't do to hang around here much longer. The river is liable to freeze over any time."

"You bet I've no desire to walk to Dawson," declared the detective. "I quite agree with you, Young Klondike, we must be on the move."

They now started in to dig the prospect hole.

Ned marked out a square of four by five feet, rather smaller than usual, but big enough for a hasty prospect where the idea was to make depth as soon as possible.

There was no trouble in digging here. The cave was warm and the ground unfrozen, so a lot of time was saved.

By noon they had the shaft down about six feet and there struck the black sand in which the richest deposit of gold is usually found.

But luck had already come their way. Scarcely a shovelful of dirt was thrown out which did not show color, and in many instances there were nuggets of no small size.

While Ned and Dick worked in the hole the Unknown, assisted by Edith, took to panning this preliminary dirt.

The result was a yield of as much as three thousand dollars, almost all in nuggets, for little account was made of the flake gold and none at all of the dust.

"There ain't the least doubt that this is a rich claim," remarked Young Klondike, as he leaned on his shovel. "A man could soon make out a fortune here."

"We'll tackle it next spring," said the detective, "and the mine shall be named for me."

"All right. We'll name it for you now," laughed Dick. "What shall we call it?"

"Call it the Unknown," replied the detective, with one of his chuckling laughs. "Ha, ha, ha! You thought you would catch me that time, didn't you? Oh, no! I'm too old a bird for that."

"I'll put a gang of men on this mine, and work it a month at my own expense, and give you every ounce of gold taken out, if you will really let it be named for you," said Ned.

"No, sir! By the Jumping Jeremiah, that would be highway robbery, and I'll never make myself a party to any such scheme!"

"Correct!" said Ned. "We ain't going to get your name to-day, it seems?"

"Not to-day, dear boy—some other day!"

"Which, being the case, I suppose I may as well go on with my digging?" laughed Ned, and that is what he did.

Now came the great discovery.

The most sanguine hopes formed by Young Klondike were realized.

Before they had gone down a foot further, a turn of the spade laid bare a nest of nuggets, which filled the entire bottom of the shaft.

Of course this discovery threw our Klondikers into a high state of excitement. Even the Unknown, who was not at all fond of going down into prospect holes, jumped right in to have a look.

"Why, it's great!" he exclaimed. "That's what it is—great! If they go down for any depth, we've got a fortune right here before us; only question is about getting away with it before we are snowed in."

With such a find as this on their hands, it is hardly to be expected that our Klondikers would feel inclined to quit work very early.

In fact, they continued at the nugget bed until Ned's watch warned them that it would soon be sun-down.

"We may as well quit now and call it a go," he said. "I don't believe we'd reach the bottom of this bed in a week."

And so they knocked off work well content with the big find in the little cave.

And why not? Dick estimated the value of the nuggets at over ten thousand dollars.

One hundred days' work at this rate would mean a million, and from the way the nugget bed appeared to run it looked as though there was nothing to hinder working it for a hundred weeks.

CHAPTER IX.

CAUGHT IN THE DEATH TRAP AGAIN.

WHEN a rat is caught in a trap the other rats are pretty apt to give the place a wide berth, and everybody knows that it is not easy to catch rats twice in front of the same hole.

Men are not always so sensible; they will run deliberately into the same danger many times.

One would hardly suppose that Young Klondike's party would go a second time into that death trap which came so near proving fatal to them, but that is just what they did.

It was the shortness of provisions which took them there.

Edith declared that they could not run two days more without laying in a fresh supply.

As it hardly seemed like robbery to help themselves to food belonging to men they fully believed to be dead, Young Klondike suggested that they quit work, then go into the big cave and take down a load of provisions, leaving the gold for some other time.

Nobody saw any danger in it, not even the Unknown, so they buried the gold under a heap of sand and started for the big cave.

Here, as in the smaller cave, things remained unchanged except that underneath the hole in the roof a lot of snow had drifted in.

"It's a terrible storm," said the detective; "boys, I hope we haven't made a mistake in staying up here so long. I only hope we may not find it impossible to get down into the canyon again."

"Oh, we'll manage it somehow," declared Ned, "but all the same we'll hurry up things. Come, Edith, you know the store-room and we don't. Lead the way."

There was a splendid supply of provisions in the store-room, as we have said before.

Piled up in a deep crevice, under the rocks, were hams and bacon, and canned goods of every description, not to mention dried fruits, crackers and cheese, and a hard baked bread which Edith went for first of all.

"There's stuff enough here to last us half the winter, if we want to stay on Mad Mountain," remarked the Unknown.

"Yes, but what are we going to do the other half?" laughed Dick. "I don't believe from the looks of things there is any game to speak of here. We'd better not think of staying, for it would be an even chance if we should find ourselves alive in spring."

As nobody seriously thought of staying, Dick did not manage to get up any discussion. There were several sacks of potatoes here, and Ned emptying out three of them they proceeded to fill them up again with the pick of the provisions, and were soon ready to start.

It was growing colder; the air even here in the cave had an icy chill. And the wind whistled over the break in the roof, blowing the snow down all about them.

Once or twice loose pieces of rock had fallen, just to remind them of what might happen, and yet no one seemed to so regard the warning, but only took it as a matter of course.

Consequently no one was prepared for the awful crash which now suddenly burst upon their ears.

It was just as they were turning away from the store-room that it came.

With a thunderous reverberation down dropped another great section of the roof directly over the shaft.

It was overwhelming for the moment.

Ned, Dick and Edith had been through it before, and knew how to handle themselves, but it was the first time for the Unknown, and he seized Edith's arm and hurried her over to the other side of the cave, shouting:

"Ye gods and little fishes! the whole thing is coming down! The world is coming to an end! Where shall we go? What shall we do?"

And so on. He kept it up until the rock ceased to fall.

"Now what do you think of that?" cried Ned. "That's the sort of thing we went through with, and—thunder! Our way out is cut off!"

"Didn't you realize that before?" said Dick, quietly. "You see, the death trap has closed on us again."

"What did you suppose I was making all the noise about?" cried the detective. "Ye gods and little fishes! We are shut up here like rats in a trap. We shall never be able to get out now."

And the wind howled mournfully above them, driving the snow down into the hole.

It was a bad business—a very, very serious affair.

The shaft was now buried under tons of stone, to remove which seemed quite impossible.

Young Klondike's party could congratulate themselves that they had escaped with their lives, but that was all.

Bitter regrets were now in order.

If they had only been satisfied with the day's diggings and gone back to the old cave with their gold, leaving the provisions for another day.

These and a dozen other things floated through their thoughts.

But the "if" could not save them now. They were caught in the death trap with no apparent chance of getting out.

The hours of that awful night which followed were hard to bear.

Morning came at last and found our Klondikers half frozen in the death trap. The storm had passed away and it had turned off piercing cold.

This meant the freezing of the Klondike; meant that they would have to remain on Mad Mountain all through the long winter even if they succeeded in getting out of the death trap.

Altogether the situation was as bad as bad could be.

But our Klondikers took it coolly once they settled down to face the music.

There was still a chance to get at the store-room and that was a great point.

Then the wood supply which had been brought into the cave by its former occupants was undisturbed, and Young Klondike saw that he could congratulate himself on the fact that there was no danger of either freezing or starving.

So when it turned off cold, he and Dick built a fire, and they all sat round it until morning.

As soon as it was daylight Edith cooked breakfast, and they all sat down to eat.

"Well, what do you say; how are you going to untie this knot, Young Klondike?" asked the Unknown, with his mouth full of hot ham.

"It can't be untied," said Dick gloomily. "We've just got to stay here until the balance of the roof falls in, and that will be the end."

"The end of us or of the roof?"

"Of both, I'm thinking. Ye gods and little fishes! We're in a pretty pickle. I don't know whether to shoot myself, dance a sailor's hornpipe and try to be jolly, or to begin unpling those stones, a job which I might reasonably hope to finish in about a hundred years."

"Zed," said Edith, almost sternly, "I don't think this is any time for fooling. Why don't you try to be sensible and suggest something for us to do?"

"I can only suggest one thing, and that is to unpile the stones."

"I suppose we might do it in time," said Ned, dubiously.

"I think we might," replied Dick. "Anyway we may as well work as remain idly here by the fire. At least it will help to keep us warm."

And this was what they did all the morning.

By noon they had succeeded in moving a good deal of the stone—a great deal more than they thought they could move in so short a time.

Edith had a fine dinner ready by the time they knocked off, and all sat down to it feeling rather encouraged.

"It can be done," said Ned. "I don't believe it would take more than a week to move those stones and clear the shaft."

"And that means we may still have a chance to get down the river before winter sets in," said Dick. "It's getting considerably warmer. I don't believe this cold snap will freeze the river solid. I don't give up hope."

"Nor I," said Edith. "If Dick can hope I'm quite sure the rest of us can."

"Ahem!" said the Unknown, solemnly. "Listen, dear friends; I am about to make a speech.

"I want to observe that if the rest of the roof doesn't fall and crush us, we may fairly consider ourselves safe."

"Why make any such suggestion?" replied Ned. "Do you suppose we want to hear anything like that?"

"Stop! You wrong me! By the Jumping Jeremiah, you do wrong me!" broke in the Unknown. "I've been struck by an idea."

"Did it hit you hard?" asked Edith, laughingly.

"Hope to goodness it didn't hurt you much," added Dick.

"Let the Unknown speak," said Ned. "Don't cut the grand ideas of our nameless friend off in

in their infancy. Let us hear what they amount to. Fire up, Zed!"

"Well, then, to begin again. Ahem!" chuckled the detective.

"You said that before, you remember," broke in Dick.

"Am I to be allowed to speak, or am I not to be allowed to speak?" demanded the Unknown.

"Decidedly you are to be allowed to speak. Go on," said Ned.

"Young Klondike has spoken, and Young Klondike is boss. As I remarked before—ahem!"

"Now you are waiting for someone to take you up, and I won't do it," said Dick.

"Wise youth! When I said that I had been seized with an idea I only stated part of the truth. I have been seized with several ideas, and the first is that in our present precarious position——"

"Present precarious position is good," said Dick, beneath his breath. "You'd better stuff that and hang it up to dry."

"Your observations are beneath notice, Mr. Dick Luckey. I decline to pay the slightest attention to them. As I was about to remark, I have come to the conclusion that in our present precarious position, shut up as we are in a death trap with death staring us in the face——"

"Too many deaths in that sentence," laughed Ned. "We can't die but once, you know."

"Avast there, Young Klondike! Ye gods and little fishes! Can't I speak without all these interruptions? I was to observe that in our present precarious position, I have an idea I ought to tell my name."

"Hooray!" shouted Dick. "By gracious, if I had known what it was you were driving at I'd have held my tongue."

"By all means tell it. I quite agree with you," said Ned. "You owe it to yourself and to us to do that very thing."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do!"

"Well, so do I, and I'll take the matter under serious consideration. I'll let you know my decision at the end of the week."

"Rubbish!" cried Ned.

"Rats!" exclaimed Dick.

"I begin to think, Zed, that you never had a name," said Edith. "If that's all your ideas amount to I don't think much of them—I'll tell you that straight!"

"Thank you. It could not be expected that my idea would amount to much, Edith, and you'll quite agree with me when you hear the second."

"Which is——"

"Listen, dear friends. My second idea is that we are all a parcel of fools!"

"That's admitted," said Ned. "We were the biggest kind of fools ever to come back in this place!"

"True; but I don't refer to that at all!"

"To what then?"

"To spending our time moving those stones."

"Don't agree with you."

"You don't! Have you stopped to think?"

"Well, no; I can't say I have according to your line, for I don't know what that line is."

"Exactly so; now listen: The shaft is covered, ain't it?"

"Decidedly it is."

"Just so. Now watch me."

The Unknown jumped up, moved toward the great heap of stone, and took his stand in a certain place.

"What's this?" he demanded. "Now, will you think?"

"Thunder!" cried Ned, springing up. "We are fools. Why, right under your feet is the drift which leads to the little cave."

"Hooray! Young Klondike has waked up at last!" cried the Unknown, tossing up his tall hat and catching it on his head as it came down.

It was a great discovery.

Somewhere under that ground lay the tunnel. They only had to dig to find it—at least they thought so then.

But it turned out far otherwise.

While they were still talking, another crash came.

A few loose pieces of rock falling gave them warning, and profiting by their past experience all hands made a rush for the other side of the cave.

They were not a moment too soon.

All in an instant the crash followed.

About all there was left of the roof came down then.

It left Young Klondike's party unharmed, but it buried the ground above the drift completely. Tons and tons of rock fell upon it, and when it was all over Young Klondike saw that they might as well try to move the whole of Mad Mountain as to clear off that vast pile of stone.

Caught in the death trap?

Yes, worse than ever.

There had been some slight chance of escape before, but now there was none.

CHAPTER X.

LOST UNDERGROUND.

THE long, gloomy night that followed gave Young Klondike plenty of time for thought.

Dick slept well, and so did the Unknown and Edith, but Ned could not sleep, so he spent the night pacing the cave for the most part, and never calling Dick to stand his watch, as had been agreed.

It seemed terribly hard to have that last hope cut off, but so it had to be.

It was simply useless to think of digging down into the drift now, but along toward morning Ned got an idea which bid fair to let them out of the trap.

He had been over to the store-room, which fortunately remained undisturbed, to get some crackers, for

he was feeling a bit hungry, when all at once it occurred to him to look at the sixth map again.

The big reflecting lantern had been lighted here by the store-room early in the evening as there was plenty of oil in a large can among the other valuables stored under the ledge.

Ned sat down on the rock and while munching his crackers got out the map again for another look.

There was a second circle on the map—a little one over in a corner which Young Klondike had suddenly remembered, and it occurred to him just then that it might mean the cave.

When he came to examine it now, he was satisfied that it did mean the cave.

The line of the tunnel terminated in it and thus looked as though such might be its meaning.

Another line took a semi-circular course and ended there also—ran into the other side of the small circle.

When he had previously examined the map Ned paid little attention to this, but now he began to puzzle his brains to understand its meaning, for it seemed to him that it could indicate nothing else than another passage out of the cave.

"I believe it is," he muttered, "and what's more I believe it comes in high up on the side of the wall here. Let's see, that would bring it over the store-room, just above where I am now, in point of fact. Blest if I don't think that's about the place where we first saw those men."

It will be remembered that the men were first seen in one place, and then disappearing for a few moments were seen again in another, where they were caught in the crash.

This idea now took firm hold of Ned.

He began to think that the passage indicated by this curved line would be found away above the general level, and he immediately looked about for a place where he could climb the rocky wall and explore.

There was no possible chance there by the store-room, but he soon saw that by climbing to the top of the first pile of rock which had fallen, it would bring him up to the level where he had first seen the men.

Ned lost no time in climbing the pile, a comparatively easy matter, by the way, but there seemed to be no chance of going along the wall to the point over the store-room.

He gave it up then, for it was not easy to see much up there with only the lantern's light.

But when morning came he showed the map to Dick and told his theory.

The Unknown, who had been washing his face in the stream, came along just then and entered heartily into the idea.

"Why, I believe you've hit it, Ned," he remarked. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, I believe you've struck the nail square on the head!"

"That's what I thought last night. Couldn't make a go of it, though. Still, I'm ready to try it again."

It had cleared off now. Bright sunlight came streaming into the hole, and it was decidedly warmer.

On general principles, all hands were most anxious to get out, and especially so now that the weather had moderated, for it seemed their last chance to get down the Klondike before winter set in.

"Going to try it now, boys, or will you wait till after breakfast?" asked Edith, who was working over the fire then.

"Oh, we'll try it now," said Ned. "It won't take but a few moments. If we can't get along the wall we shall give it up, of course."

"Not at all of course," said the detective. "We can pile up stones here, so as to climb up if we see the least sign of a break in the rock."

"Perhaps we may strike it. Here goes!" cried Ned, as he ran off toward the big stone heap, followed by Dick.

The Unknown went on with his toilet intending to join them later on.

Before he had fully dried his face a shout from Ned caused his attention to the top of the stone pile.

"There's a regular gallery here!" called Young Klondike. "It ain't more than two feet wide, but it runs above over the store-room. Only wonder is we didn't see it before."

"Where?"

"Up here over our heads! See!"

"Can't see it. Rock looks all smooth to me."

"It ain't, though. If we can only get up there I'll soon show you what I mean."

Instead of coming up the pile the Unknown stood watching and saw Ned get on Dick's shoulders, clutch the rock, and slowly pull himself up.

"Here I am!" he cried. "There's just room enough to get a footing here and no more."

"Pull me up!" called Dick.

"No! It ain't necessary. Stay where you are. I'm going along here to explore."

As Ned hurried along the wall it seemed impossible to comprehend what he was standing on.

All at once he disappeared, and they could hear his shout announcing that he had found the tunnel.

"It's here!" he cried, popping out a moment later. "It leads right in under the cliffs, and I can't see any end to it. This is surely the way they came. Come here, Zed, and bring the ropes and the lantern; this thing must be explored."

"Not till I've had my breakfast, you bet," declared the detective. "You'd better come down and have yours too, Ned."

"All right, I'm agreeable. There's plenty of time."

Ned dropped down on the stone heap and with Dick returned to the floor of the cave.

Breakfast was eaten quietly, but it is unnecessary to say that everyone was in the highest state of excitement.

"How about provisions?" asked Edith. "Once we start out it ain't likely we shall come back again if we have any luck. We've got to have a stock of

eatables before we go down the Klondike, that's sure."

"Of course we have, and we must take them with us," said the detective. "Can we climb up on the ledge there loaded, Ned? What do you think?"

"I'm sure we can't. It really ain't any use to try."

"Then the stuff must be passed up to us and we'll have to load down on the ledge."

"That can be done. Hadn't we better do a little exploring first though?"

"I think it would be a good idea. Let's you and I and Dick go up while Edith picks out such stuff as she thinks we are likely to need."

It was so arranged.

There were plenty of ropes in the store-room. Picking out one of the shorter ones, Ned led the way up the stone heap, climbing upon the ledge by the aid of Dick's shoulders as he had done before.

Then making the rope fast to a projecting point of rocks he helped Dick to pull himself up, the Unknown following.

There was not room for more than one on the width of the ledge and they had to stand in single file.

"Now then for your tunnel!" exclaimed the Unknown. "I'm anxious to see it. By the Jumping Jeremiah, I insist on your tunnel being produced right away."

"It's here, and don't you forget it," said Ned. "This way. Follow me!"

They crept along the face of the rock to a point nearly over Edith's head.

"Is that where it is?" she called, looking up.

"Yes, right here," replied Ned. "Look out! We are going in now!"

One by one they disappeared.

The mouth of the tunnel was low down against the ledge, and they had to stoop in order to enter it.

Ned lighted the lantern, and flashed it in as far as the light would penetrate.

"What about this?" he exclaimed. "You can see for yourselves how far it goes. There ain't any apparent end."

"It certainly is just what we want, and I believe it joins one of the other tunnels," said the Unknown, greatly pleased.

"Or comes out in the big sink," added Dick.

"The map says it joins the tunnel next above ours," said Ned. "You can see it here for yourself."

"No; it ain't necessary. I'll take your word for it. This is certainly a great discovery, and one that must be followed up."

"It's only a question of provisions now," remarked Dick. "We better not lose any more time. It will take a good half hour to get our stuff up here and loaded on our backs so that we can carry it."

"The loading had better be done in the cave," said the detective. "We want plenty of string and I saw several balls of it among the other things there in the store-room. I think, too, that we'd better carry one of the ropes along."

"Ain't that loading ourselves down unnecessarily?" asked Ned.

"Not a bit of it. We may run into some place where it is absolutely necessary. It better go."

"But no mining tools."

"Not one, you bet. We don't want any more gold. We know where we can put our hands on enough to last us for one while if we can only get out of this infernal death trap—that must be our work now."

Without further discussion they returned to the ground.

"Well, how about the tunnel?" asked Edith.

"It's all right," replied Ned. "Nothing could be more promising."

"And we owe it all to you, Ned. Who would ever have thought that the little circle scrawled there on the sixth map would lead to this?"

"We owe it to old Joe Bunker for making the map—that's who we owe it to."

"We owe the whole business to Joe Bunker," said the Unknown. "If it hadn't been for him we would never have come here in the first place, but we owe it to ourselves to get out of here now just as quick as we can."

The provisions were the only delay.

First thing was to carry them up on top of the stone heap.

Edith had been careful to select only the most useful articles, and to confine herself strictly to only such as they could probably carry.

Ned then went up on the ledge and Dick loading below they hoisted the stuff up in a mining bucket, and later when all hands came up it was carried on into the tunnel.

Everything was now ready for a start, and the Unknown proceeded to load Ned and Dick down.

Edith insisted upon taking her share, although the Unknown declared that he could carry all that remained.

Everything being ready, Ned lighted the small lantern and led the way into the tunnel.

The big lantern was left lighted behind them. For a long time it seemed, they watched its light as they tramped on into the tunnel.

Time was soon coming when they would be only too rejoiced to see that light again.

When they lost it at last, the tunnel taking a turn, the small lantern showed them another straight stretch for a long distance ahead.

This puzzled Young Klondike considerably, for the line on the sixth map was a curved line, and crude as the maps were Ned had found them wonderfully accurate.

He stopped now, and consulted the map again, finding that the line did run back straight from the small circle for a considerable distance and then made its curve.

"You'll find this is correct," he remarked. "We'll come to the big turn soon."

"Hold on," said Dick, as Ned was about to put up

the map. "What's the meaning of all these short lines going off the curve?"

"Must be openings in the rocks. I can't imagine them to be anything else."

"Look here," said the detective, who was looking over the other's shoulder; "there's going to be trouble. Don't you see your line don't go into the sink? It stops just short of it, and there's a cross line drawn at the end. Now, what does that mean?"

Ned had not noticed this, and was puzzled.

Dick was inclined to turn it off, and say that it didn't mean anything, but Ned's confidence in the map was absolute.

"It has a meaning, you may depend upon it. Every line here has a meaning," he declared.

"Then it can only mean that this tunnel does not end at the sink, but is cut off at the end," said the detective.

There was no use in discussing it, however.

The only thing was to go ahead and see.

Soon they proved the accuracy of the map again, for they came to a point where the tunnel narrowed up and took an abrupt curve.

It went right on curving, twisting around, so that the detective was ready to positively assert that they were going back in the direction by which they had started out.

A little further and they knew what the cross lines meant.

Tunnel after tunnel went off out of the main one, some on one side and some on the other.

They were for the most part narrow rifts in the rock, but one or two were as large as the main tunnel itself, and they curved out of it in such a way that all saw how difficult it would be to follow the main tunnel if they attempted to return.

"If we are driven back on our tracks, we've got to look out for ourselves," said the detective. "You can see what a serious matter it would be to get lost underground here, Ned."

They had the chance given them to exercise all their skill in this direction after a few moments, for they soon came to the end of the main tunnel.

It was just as the detective anticipated. The tunnel led them abruptly up against a dead wall of rock, and there was no going any further, and yet upon the map this was close on the great circle or sin...

Did old Joe Bunker know that it ended here, or did he only guess at it?

Ned thought the latter, but it made no difference, the fearful disappointment overwhelmed them all.

"We're as bad off as ever," said the detective. "None of those cross lines connect with any of the other tunnel lines if I remember right, Ned."

"No, they don't."

"It's a bad job then?"

"The worst kind. Chances are this place has never been fully explored by Joe Bunker. He marked these tunnels down as he found them and that is all the good man could do."

"There's nothing left for us but to do a little exploring on our own account or go back," said Edith.

"Go back—we can't go back!" declared Ned. "What have we got to go back to? Nothing but our death."

"That's right," said the detective. "We can only go back as a last resort, and I say we ought not to do it until every tunnel has been explored, for remember, boys, one of these tunnels may lead us into the sink, and it will be an easy matter for us to get from there into the old cave, and then we are safe."

They talked it over further and it was determined to adopt the detective's suggestion.

Returning in their tracks with the intention of beginning at the last tunnel as they were going—that is the one nearest to the cave—they soon came upon the first on their right; there was one on the left here, too, and two others a little further on.

But as they pushed ahead they soon found that the tunnels ceased.

Their way grew narrower now and the rocks around them began to wear an unfamiliar look:

Ned suddenly stopped short, exclaiming:

"By gracious, do you know I believe we've missed our way after all."

"I was just beginning to think so myself," said Dick. "I believe we got off into one of the cross tunnels, while we supposed we were keeping straight on by the main line."

Of course the only thing was to go back, and they did so, coming at last to the point where the tunnels divided.

Here they found themselves face to face with another dilemma.

They seemed to have lost the run of the different tunnels. It was impossible to tell which was which.

Dick was sure that one of the openings before them was the main tunnel. Ned was equally sure of another, while the detective and Edith remained neutral; the latter declared positively that she did not know which was which.

"Well, we can only try them," said Ned. "We'll take yours, Dick; you are just as liable to be right as I am, and if we find ourselves wrong we can turn back."

They had not gone far before they saw a new danger confronting them.

This tunnel was clearly not the place. Many cross passages opened off from it. They curved this way and that, until it became hopelessly confusing.

"We must go back at once," declared the detective. "No wonder they call this Mad Mountain; it's enough to send the most level headed fellow in creation to the madhouse to try to make anything out of this."

But it was easier to say go back than to do it.

The moment they tried to return the way grew more perplexing.

From one tunnel they got into another and when they tried to turn back found themselves in another still.

An hour passed.

It grew worse and worse.

"I give it up," said Ned, stopping then and leaning hopelessly against the wall. "I throw up the sponge. We are lost—lost underground!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE ENEMY AGAIN.

It was a bad business—very bad indeed.

Altogether it looked as if there was no way out of it for Young Klondike and his friends.

Even the Unknown, usually so sanguine under all circumstances, looked deeply troubled as they stood there leaning against the rocky wall.

"What in thunder are we going to do?" queried Dick.

"Don't ask me," replied Ned. "I'll never tell you. We've got to get out of here mighty sudden, though, or we are going to find ourselves in the dark."

Now this was perhaps the most serious part of it.

The lantern had about burned itself out.

Unfortunately Edith never thought of adding oil to the rest of the stores.

They had not a drop to replenish the dying flame.

It was bad enough to be lost underground with this feeble light to guide them, how much worse then would it be to be lost in the dark.

"Is it really so near gone as all that, dear boy?" asked the Unknown hollowly.

"That's what it is. You can shake the lantern and see for yourself."

"It will do no good. I can take your word for it. Ned, I don't give up easy as a rule—you know that."

"Well, I do; but how can any of us help giving up now? Blest if I can see where help is coming from!"

"Listen," said the Unknown, holding up his hands. "I wish you all to swear a swear. Hold up your hands like me."

All obeyed.

"Now, then, the first man, or woman, either, who says one despairing word, may he or she never escape from this hole! I swear to be cheerful to the end, no matter what that may be, and I want you all to swear the same!"

"Done," said Dick.

"There won't be a word out of me," said Ned.

"Same here," declared Edith. "We can't starve yet, and darkness does not kill."

"Now, then," said the Unknown, "let's keep right on through the tunnel, and never budge to the right or left as long as the light lasts."

They kept steadily on for half an hour.

Dimmer and dimmer grew the light. Now silence came upon them all. They knew that soon the darkness must come, too.

The tunnel seemed interminable, and ran very straight.

For ten minutes they had come to no cross passage.

It began to look as if they really might hope to come out somewhere, when all at once the light began to flicker, and the feeble flame went out.

In an instant they were enveloped in profound darkness.

It is easier to imagine their sensations than to describe them. To attempt it in words would be to do what none of the party did, for they kept right on walking, and no one spoke.

Young Klondike still led off, and he did it with just as free and bold a step as ever, and yet he fully realized that at any moment the next step might take him to his death.

So did the others; in his unselfishness Dick would not have had it so if he could have prevented it.

"Hold on, Ned!" he called at last. "We are going to make a change now."

"Change! What change? What do you mean?" asked Ned.

"You've run risk enough; it is my turn now."

"Who says so? What's the matter? Ain't I going all right?"

"You are doing well, but I insist upon being allowed to take some of the risk."

"Bother! I'll attend to that."

"It's only fair," said the Unknown. "I'll take my chance in leading off any time—I'd rather take it now than not."

"Can't be done. I've got the lead, and I mean to keep it," Ned declared.

"Then you'll leave me behind," said Dick. "I won't go another step unless I can be allowed to take my turn."

"You ought to do it, Ned," said Edith. "I don't want to say anything, because I suppose you won't let me do my part, but I'd like to all the same, and I can understand just how Dick feels."

Then Ned yielded up his place to Dick, and the gloomy march was resumed.

For fully fifteen minutes it proceeded in silence, when all at once the whole party were startled by a sharp explosion, which was followed by a crash of falling rock.

Of course they stopped and listened. After the sounds died away voices could be heard talking in the distance.

It was startling to hear them so.

"What can it mean?" whispered Edith. "We have run up against something sure."

"Not a doubt of it," replied the detective, "and it is for our best interest to proceed with the greatest caution, let come what will, I'm glad."

"Anything for a change, I suppose," said Ned.

"So I say. Anything to break that horrible silence. How far off should you say they were, Ned?"

"Not far. Listen! There's one peculiarity about those voices. Can you detect what I mean, Mr. Detective?"

"Well, I can't say I do detect it. Wait a minute though. I don't give up yet. Give me time."

All listened attentively now.

The voices were fainter than those heard behind the talking rock and reached their ears with a muffled sound.

"They are behind something," said Dick. "Is that it?"

"Not at all," replied Ned. "That ain't what I mean."

"Strange I can't catch on to it," said the detective. "I really feel quite ashamed of myself, Young Klondike. Do you still hear the thing you mean?"

"Yes, I do."

"Bother! I ought to be kicked! Edith, can you make out what Ned is driving at?"

"The voices sound to me as though they were not on a line with us," said Edith. "Is that it, Ned?"

"You are getting hot," replied Ned. "You are very close to it now."

"Edith is right," said the detective, after a moment. "They are below us. Have I hit it now?"

"You have," said Ned. "That's what I meant. Those voices are undoubtedly below us; now what does that imply?"

"That there is a drop in this path right ahead of us!"

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"So do I."

"Then we must move with greater caution than ever. Here, it's my turn to take the lead. Get back there, Dick."

"You ain't going—it's me," said Ned, but the Unknown wouldn't have it so at all.

He pushed his way to the front and led off boldly. Yet for all that he observed the greatest care.

Although they could not see him do it, the Unknown never put his foot down without feeling for the rock and knowing that he was treading somewhere.

This saved him.

All of a sudden he fell back on Dick who could feel him tremble from head to foot.

"There's nothing ahead of us, boys!" he gasped. "Hold me, Dick! By the Jumping Jeremiah! I thought I was all ready for it, but it has turned my head now that it has come."

"Good enough! We know it in time anyhow," said Ned. "Brace up, old man! Your care has saved us. Do you hear the voices now?"

They listened but could hear nothing at first.

Then came the ring of hammers upon a drill reminding them of the talking rock.

"It must be the same old gang," said the Unknown. "Chances are it's the enemy. More than likely they escaped after all."

"I'm beginning to think so," replied Ned. "Come now, it's my turn. Let me get in ahead there."

"What to do?"

"Never you mind."

"Nothing rash, I hope—I won't have that at all."

"Let me take my turn and don't bother. I ain't going to commit suicide. I'll promise you that."

The Unknown stepped back, and Ned passing to the front lay down flat on the rocks.

"I was just going to do that myself," said the detective, "judging by the sounds what was going on."

"Were you? Then I'm in ahead of you. Hold on to my feet, Dick."

"You're leaning over the edge there?" asked Dick.

"Yes, as far as I dare. When you get hold of me, I shall pull out further. That's the talk! Hold on tight now—here I go! Hooray! I see a light!"

Here was good news!

Edith clapped her hands and would have pressed forward to have a look if the Unknown had not held her back.

"Don't dare to try it!" he exclaimed. "What is it, dear boy. Do you see the light now?"

"Not now! I was way in under the rocks. We seem to be standing on a projecting shelf. It's a good hundred feet down there, and—thunder! Here comes the light!"

Suddenly the darkness was dissipated. All could now see that they were standing on the verge of a precipice. Far below them a man came into view. He was flashing a big reflecting lantern upward.

"Hello up there! Hello!" he cried. "That you, Sam?"

Dick had the presence of mind to drop flat on the rock, and the Unknown drew Edith down.

"They've heard us talking," he whispered. "Shall you answer him, Ned?"

"No, don't answer! Don't think of it, if you value our lives!" spoke a voice behind them. "Pull back out of sight there!"

Startling as it was to hear this voice speaking out of the darkness, Ned had the presence of mind to immediately obey.

"That you, Young Klondike?" spoke the voice again. "Don't be alarmed. I'm your friend if you have a friend in this horrible place. Get back here a little out of sight. Get back all of you—then you shall see me and not before."

They crawled back over the rocks.

Meanwhile, the man down at the bottom of the pit called again and again. Receiving no answer he turned his lantern and walked away.

Young Klondike scrambled to his feet, the others following his example.

"Where are you? Who are you?" Ned asked.

"Here I am! Look at me!" the voice immediately answered. Then all at once an old man stood before them, holding a lighted lantern.

There he was filling up the entrance to another tunnel, and all recognized his remarkable resemblance to old Joe Bunker at a glance.

"My dear friend! How are you?" gasped the Unknown, rushing forward to grasp his hand, as though he were a long lost brother.

"Keep back! I'm here for one purpose only," said the old man, waving him off.

"Hello! No use for me?" exclaimed the Unknown.

"My business here is to save the life of the man who buried my dead brother. Young Klondike, follow me!"

"Not without my friends," replied Ned stoutly. "Of course you can't mean for me to do that?"

"I do. I saved this man once, and if he was fool enough to go back again into that death trap, is it my fault? Clearly not. For you I am willing to risk my life, but the rest must stay behind and take their chances."

"You don't mean it!"

"I am in dead earnest. You don't know the risk I run? Hark! Don't you hear them calling me now?"

"Sam! Hello, Sam! Are you up there?" the voice was heard again shouting out of the pit.

"Quick! It's now or never," said the man. "Follow me, Young Klondike, but if one of the rest of you attempts to follow I've got this."

He drew a revolver and covered them. There was a wild, desperate look in the man's eyes. Ned was almost inclined to think him mad.

He stepped forward, and the man retreated as he advanced.

"Come, come on!" he called. "Keep back the rest of you! Young Klondike, follow me!"

"Sam! Sam! Sam!" shouted the voice out of the pit still again.

It was the enemy and this man was one of the gang.

Of course Young Klondike never dreamed of deserting his friends. It is not necessary to say that he had no such idea.

He followed the retreating figure into the tunnel a few yards, disappearing around a turn.

Dick and the others watched him breathlessly.

"He mustn't go," breathed Dick.

"Do you think for an instant he would desert us?" asked Edith. "That's not Ned."

"No, no! But suppose his scheme fails?"

"It won't! There he goes!" cried the Unknown.

A sudden rush and the sound of a fall—then a shot, all heard in the same instant.

"Come on! Come on! I've got him foul?" cried Ned.

"Sam! Sam! Hello, Sam!" shouted the voice from the pit behind them.

It was the enemy again.

CHAPTER XII.

OFF DOWN THE KLONDIKE WITH A LOAD OF GOLD.

It is always darkest just before daylight they say.

It must have been pretty near the dawn of better things for Young Klondike's party just about then, for it seemed as if there could be no chance for Ned when they saw him struggling with that big, power-

fellow right at the edge of another precipice up to which the tunnel ran.

The lantern had been overturned by the fall and lay on its side, sputtering.

Edith seized it and Dick and the Unknown made a rush for the combatants, but before they could reach them they rolled over the edge of the rocks.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" cried Edith, covering her eyes in horror, but the danger was only imaginary after all.

"I've got him!" cried Ned. "Come here! I've got him now!"

They rushed to the edge of the rocks to see Ned sitting on Sam Bunker, about five feet below them.

It was only a shelf, no precipice. Beyond the tunnel sloped down rapidly into the darkness.

Ned was perfectly cool as well he might be, for he had the old fellow by the throat, and the dreaded revolver was in his own hand.

"Come on, Zed! I've got him! There's no fight left here!" he cried.

Dick and the detective were at his side in a moment.

They caught the man between them and pulled him to his feet.

The result now was just the opposite to what they expected.

"Hold on, gentlemen! Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I'm done!" cried the man.

"About time!" growled the Unknown. "You'll show us the way out of this infernal mountain—that's what you'll do!"

"Just so! Exactly what I propose to do. I could show you a dozen ways out of Mad Mountain if I chose. Ha, ha, ha! You thought we were all dead when those rocks came down on us, didn't you, Young Klondike? Well, we were out of danger before danger came, and lucky for you we were, for my partners meant to kill you then."

"You'd better not talk—act," said the detective, sternly. "I don't know what kind of a man you are, my good friend, whether you are a lunatic or what, but if you know a way out of this show it, and we'll reward you well."

"Put a pistol at my head and I'll do it. Young Klondike, you dealt me a crusher! You needn't have done that."

"There's the pistol, but I don't know what you are driving at," said Ned.

He cocked the revolver and covered him, though, and what is more he did not take it away.

Without another word Sam Bunker led the way down the tunnel.

"Keep me covered!" he called. "I have sworn never to divulge the secrets of this mountain, unless it is at the revolver's point, and I want to keep my oath; that's all that's the matter with me."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" cried the Unknown. "Now we begin to understand you, boss. Never mind. We won't give you away."

Sam Bunker made no answer but just hurried on, continually descending.

Ned thought that they were going down into the pit, and he began to wonder if after all they were not being betrayed.

Still it seemed absurd to fancy that any man would make such conditions merely to betray them, and so they followed on, until at length they came to another cross tunnel leading off to the right.

"Your way lies there," said Sam Bunker. "Take it and go. Leave this place as soon as possible, or I'll not answer for your lives!"

Thus saying he ran down the slope into the darkness and was gone in an instant.

Ned shouted to him to return, but he paid no heed.

"Do we want him? No!" cried Dick. "Let's go right out."

"Let him go," said the detective. "File right, Ned. Queer old duffer. All the same I believe he's telling the truth."

Ned immediately turned into the tunnel and they hurried on at all speed.

They had not far to go. Inside of five minutes the tunnel suddenly narrowed and went winding around a big mass of rock by a trail so narrow that they had to go sideways to pass, and then all at once they came out into a cave through which a stream ran.

"Hello! Hello!" cried the detective. "We ought to know this place!"

It was the little cave.

There was the spot where they had accomplished that wonderful gold digging, right ahead of them; there were the tools they had left scattered about.

"Safe, by thunder!" cried Dick. "It's all plain sailing now."

It certainly looked so when a few moments later they found themselves out upon the side of Mad Mountain, and saw everything white with snow.

The next move was to get down into the canyon and the next was to hurry back to the cave which had been their camp.

It was an immense relief to get there and drop the heavy loads which they had carried through it all.

The events of the last two days seemed like a dream.

Ned could hardly realize that they had happened, but as he looked around he saw something which impressed it upon his mind pretty plainly that they were real.

On the same stone where Sam Bunker's letter had been found now lay another—a folded paper pinned together.

Ned seized it, tore it open, and read as follows.

"YOUNG KLONDIKE:—You are now safe, and you owe it all to me. We don't want you here. If my partners knew what I had done they would kill me. Go at once. The provisions you took from our storehouse you may keep, for all me, but lose no time in getting down off the mountain, and beware how you tell what happened to you here. These diggings are ours, and we will share them with none. Even my brother was driven off—driven to his death, which I

ply regret. Go! Don't think of losing a moment taking an ounce of gold with you. For my dead other's sake I do this.

"SAM BUNKER."

"We must go," said Edith. "That man means business—he must be obeyed."

"Shan't do anything of the sort," said Ned, stout-

"I don't propose to be scared off Mad Mountain him or any one else. We are going, of course, but the gold we dug in the little cave goes with us. As for his provisions I'll pay for them. I'll leave dust enough to cover three times their value right here."

"Do you really mean it?" asked Dick. "It seems to me we are running a terrible risk."

"Of course, I mean it, Zed. What do you say? Am I right or am I wrong?"

"Right," said the detective, stoutly. "It's all very well for these fellows to work secret diggings up here, but they don't own Mad Mountain, not by a good deal. We've a perfect right to the gold we dug out of the ground, and from what we know I should say that their diggings must be located away back in the tunnels somewhere, and certainly not in the little cave."

So it was settled.

Mysterious threats and warnings went for little with Young Klondike. He was quite able to stand up for his rights.

Edith cooked supper as quietly as if there had been Sam Bunker, and the night passed without disturbance.

Next morning our party started down the mountain to the boats, carrying such provisions as they absolutely needed for their journey down the Klondike.

The boats were found to be just as they left them, but what was still more satisfactory the river, although frozen over on the sides, still offered a narrow channel for the passage of the boats.

"It will be a close call if it happens to freeze hard tonight," said the Unknown. "What do you say to going now, Ned, and letting the gold go to thunder. Anyway, we have enough."

"I say no. I'm determined to have that gold," cried Ned, emphatically. "Dick is with me. You and Edith can stay here if you prefer, but we are going back to the little cave to bring down the nuggets and dust."

"All right. Young Klondike is boss. You bet we can't stay here alone, do we Edith?"

"Of course not," replied Edith, and they were soon on their way up Mad Mountain again.

It was six trips up the mountain, and six down; six trips from the old cave to Golden Valley and back to the little cave.

During all this time—and it took until nearly midnight—they neither saw nor heard anything of Sam Bunker or the gang.

Thus when they found themselves at last on the river bank with the boats loaded down with gold and

all ready for a start, they began to wonder if there had been anything in Sam Bunker's last letter but idle threats after all.

It had been growing steadily colder and the ice sheet in the river was decidedly on the increase.

Further down, where the Klondike grew wider there was plenty of channel room, but up here where it narrowed down between Mad Mountain and the mountain opposite, there was certainly serious danger of being hemmed in.

"We've got to start right away if we are going at all," remarked the Unknown, as he looked off on the river; "between you and me and the gas-house, Young Klondike, I don't feel altogether sure that we shall be able to break our way through this ice to the channel; but there's no use borrowing trouble—we can only try."

Crack!

Suddenly a rifle shot rang out from the heights above them.

Crack!

Then came another.

Both bullets whistled dangerously close to Young Klondike's head.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, that means business!" cried the Unknown. "Where did they come from?"

"It means the enemy," said Ned, quietly. "Look there, boys!"

He pointed up to the snow-covered rocks some two hundred feet above them.

They counted ten men gathered on the rocks looking down. One had a long white beard, and was Sam Bunker beyond a doubt.

Suddenly one of the men flung up his rifle and fired another shot.

It whistled between Dick and Edith, going on out upon the ice beyond.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, this won't do!" cried the detective. "That's the gang, and they are on to us! We'd better make an instant start!"

"And be an easy mark for them?" said Dick. "That won't do at all!"

"What will do? We can't hide; to stand our ground means for us to fight ten! I say let's be off and take our chances in the boat!"

"Look! They are going!" cried Edith. They all looked up and saw the men running down over the snow. In a moment they had vanished, but it was sufficiently plain that they meant business, and to remain where they were could only end in having to fight the whole gang.

Now seemed to be their time, and not a moment was lost in getting into the boat.

Ned and Dick took the oars and worked the boat out; the Unknown took his station in the bows and broke the ice ahead of them as they advanced.

"I don't believe we are going to have a bit of trouble getting out into the channel," he declared. "Once we are there we are all right, providing they don't cut us off."

"How can they do that?" asked Dick. "They haven't any boat."

"Come now, come now! That's a bright remark; besides, you are making assertions about something you know nothing about."

"That's right," added Ned. "We don't know that they haven't any boat—they must have had one originally, or they never could have come this far up the Klondike; chances are that they have it hidden somewhere about here now."

"Pound away! Break up the ice! Let's get out of here as quick as we can," said Edith. "We mustn't give them a chance to get their boat."

"Hello! See what's happening!" exclaimed Ned. "That's your work, Mr. Detective. Curious that it should pile up so."

Owing to the narrowness of the channel here, the Klondike runs with great swiftness, and in open weather goes swirling about the big boulders which lie scattered all over the bed of the stream.

Now, the result of this rapid movement of the current was indeed most peculiar. The ice, broken up by the Unknown's oar, was carried down between two big boulders and began banking itself up into a miniature mountain. With great rapidity the cakes piled themselves on each other, crushing and grinding with a thunderous noise.

This so attracted the attention of our Klondikers that for the moment they forgot to keep a lookout ashore and were paid for their negligence by another surprise.

All at once they heard the sound of oars and looking shoreward saw two canoes filled with men putting out from under the rocks somewhat further down, nearly opposite the newly formed ice mountain in fact.

"The enemy!" cried the Unknown, catching sight of them.

"Headed off!" echoed Dick, "unless we can make the channel before they can break through the ice."

"Here we go now," said Ned, for with a tremendous cracking sound the ice parted and they glided into the channel.

It favored the enemy too, for it parted below.

"We've got you now, Young Klondike!" yelled Sam Bunker. "You've settled your own fate. Not

one mother's son of you shall leave Mad Mount alive!"

Instantly he raised his rifle and fired; so did others but the shots flew wild.

"Go for 'em, Edith! Go for 'em!" cried the Unknown.

There was no better shot in the whole Klondike country than Edith, and she flung up her rifle as if it would have proved this to the satisfaction of Sam Bunker's gang if there had been any need.

But there wasn't.

All in a moment a singular thing happened, which put an end to the chase almost before it began.

The foremost canoe was now abreast the ice mountain, which suddenly took the notion to topple over.

Down it came upon the heads of the men with a thundering crash, upsetting the canoe and tumbling them all into the icy water, while the men in the second canoe, unable to check its headway, ran into the wreck.

In a twinkling their canoe went over, too, and all hands were treated to a cold bath, while Young Klondike's boats went swinging down the channel into the open water.

"By-by, Bunker! We are off for Dawson and you can't stop us!" sung out the Unknown, as they moved away.

No attempt was made to stop them, for the Bunker's gang had all they could do to take care of themselves, and the boats were soon safely around the big bend in the river, after which the enemy was seen no more.

Here they struck open water, and the run to Dawson City was safely made before the river closed for the winter.

It was not a big haul that Young Klondike made, but the thrilling adventures through which they had passed were something to look back to.

This is but one of the many exciting incidents of Young Klondike's career.

There are others more entertaining still. For the thrilling train of adventures in which Ned, Dick, Edith and the Unknown took part we refer the reader to the next number of this series, entitled *YOUNG KLONDIKE'S FIGHT FOR A CLAIM; OR, THE BOOM OF RACCOON CREEK.*



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